

Short Stories.

No. 737.] Week ending February 14, 1903. [Price One Penny.



The name she wrote was not the familiar Nita Lestrangle, but the unknown Benita Bennet! Where had he heard that name before?

(A Dramatic Incident from the Story, "The Case of Benita Bennet." See inside.)

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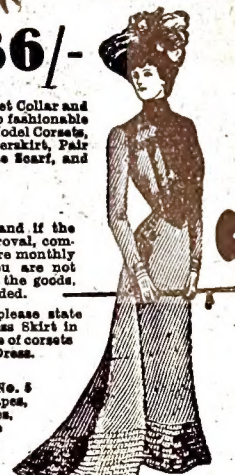
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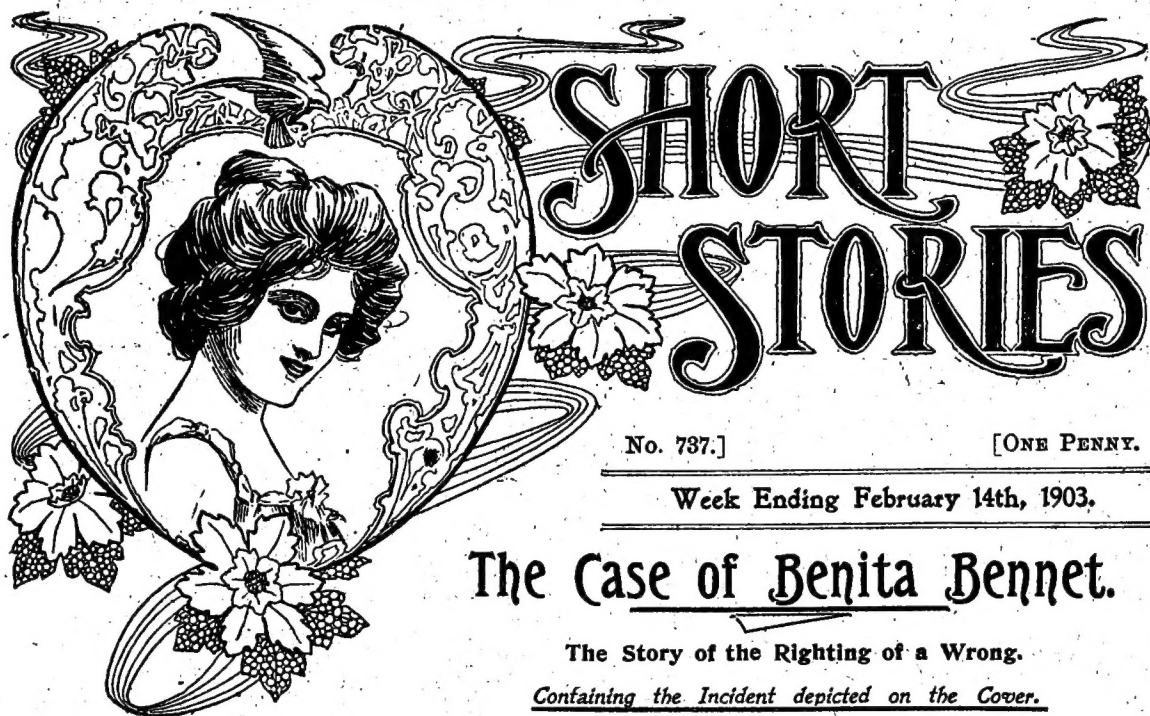
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No. 737.]

[ONE PENNY.]

Week Ending February 14th, 1903.

The Case of Benita Bennet.

The Story of the Righting of a Wrong.

Containing the Incident depicted on the Cover.

"You certainly don't look much like a *blushing* bride, Nita." And Peggy Carpenter looked discontentedly at the lovely, but marble-white girl who stood gazing at the wedding-dress outspread on the bed. "You don't appear very joyous, either. If I were going to be married to-morrow, I should be nearly off my head with joy."

"Things are different with me," replied Nita Lestrangle. "Ronald's people are so opposed to our marriage that I can't feel very happy about it."

"Ronald's people," repeated Peggy, very scornfully. "His ill-tempered old grandmother, who wants him to marry an American heiress, and his twin-brother, who has never forgiven him for coming into the world ten minutes ahead, and who doesn't want Ronald to marry at all."

"You can't wonder they don't want him to marry me," remarked Nita, turning away from the bed, "a penniless girl, who earned her living as a paid companion."

"And who was so good, faithful, and devoted, that her employer left her a thousand pounds. I'm so glad auntie left you that, dearie. The two thousand she left me makes it possible for me to marry as soon as I'm out of mourning for the dear old lady. Can you fancy me a curate's wife, Nita?"

Nita shook her head as she looked at the sparkling little face full of mischief and glee.

"It seems too commonplace a marriage for such a little gay fairy," she said.

"Oh, I'm a very common-place person. For romance apply to Miss Nita Lestrangle. How romantic was your meeting with auntie, for instance. You picked her up when she slipped on some orange-peel, and she was looking for a nurse-companion, and you were just the person for such a post. So you took to each other on the spot. Wasn't that romantic? Why, she might have been some wicked old wretch or you a bold adventuress for all either of you knew, for neither of you went in for anything so common-place as references."

Nita's pallor had changed to a vivid scarlet, and without replying, she urged her friend to come downstairs now that they had inspected the wedding finery.

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"And your meeting with Lord Loughton," went on Peggy, as they descended the stairs. "What could be more romantic? Two damsels on a lonely road assailed by a sturdy beggar; the gallant knight on his—well, not steed exactly, for it was his motor-car—to the rescue. Naturally he fell in love with—"

"Oh, do be quiet, Peggy," interrupted Nita. "Come with me to your father. I want to thank him for letting me stay with you till my marriage and for all his kindness."

The Carpenters had been indeed Nita's sheet-anchor, for after her employer's sudden death she had no home to receive her until her marriage. But the kind old rector, the brother-in-law of Nita's late employer and father of her staunch little friend, Peggy, had offered her a home and the protection of a father so long as she required them.

Lord Loughton's family were bitterly opposed to his marriage with an obscure and fortuneless girl, but he was his own master, and brooked no interference.

Lovely as a dream looked Nita as she moved up the aisle in her snowy robes, followed by Peggy as bridesmaid. The wedding-party consisted only of the bride and bridegroom, the two Carpenters and Harry Searle, Peggy's fiancé; for Ronald's grandmother and brother absolutely declined to be present, and he would have no other guests.

The ceremony concluded, the party adjourned to the vestry to sign the register. Lord Loughton, his fair, sensitive face aglow with pride and happiness, bent forward to watch Nita sign her maiden name for the last time.

How he loved that firm, large writing of hers, the clear writing that seemed indicative of a true, sincere nature. But—what did this mean? Under his watching eyes was formed a name he did not know; not the familiar Nita Lestrangle, but the unknown Benita Bennet. In startled alarm he repeated the name aloud. She turned and faced him.

"This is my name," she said firmly.

He had turned very white, but he said nothing.

The name, Benita Bennet, seemed familiar to him, but at the moment he could not remember where he had heard it.

After they had left the church it suddenly flashed across Loughton's memory that Benita Bennet was the name of a girl who had been the principal in a notorious Society scandal some years before.

The coachman had orders to drive the bride and bridegroom direct to Lord Loughton's town house, where his grandmother, the Dowager Lady Loughton, and his brother, Gerald, were staying. On arrival there the bride was introduced, and shortly afterwards Loughton brought up the name of Benita Bennet. At mention of this his newly-made wife turned very white.

"Benita Bennet," said his brother. "I've heard that name before. Oh, yes! I remember the name—and the case—perfectly well."

"Dear me, yes," chimed in the Dowager, "I remember the case distinctly, but why mention it now?"

"Because that is the name my wife—whom I knew as Nita Lestrangle—signed in the register when we were married just a short hour ago."

"You don't mean to say that's the girl," said the Dowager, and she examined Nita curiously through her lorgnettes.

The girl looked like a hunted creature at bay. Her great, dark eyes went from one hard, cruel face to the other in a kind of terrified and hopeless appeal.

"The case of Benita Bennet. Surely it was a Society scandal some years ago," said Gerald; "about five, I think. You were abroad at the time, Ronald, I remember, and would probably have only heard the name. Miss Bennet was then a very young girl, not yet introduced, I believe, but staying with a relative at a country-house, where she distinguished herself by stealing some jewellery from a fellow-guest, called—let me see—ah, Harcourt—Mrs. Harcourt."

"The case made a great sensation; the thief was so young, well-born, and rarely beautiful. The defence was kleptomaniac, of course, but it failed, and the prisoner was sentenced to a term of imprisonment, eighteen months, wasn't it?" turning insolently to Nita, who sat staring with great, miserable eyes at him as he recounted her disgrace. "Anyhow, she served her time, Ronald," he went on. "And that's the woman you've married."

Lord Loughton's fair, boyish face, looked ghastly, drawn and grey with horror and despair. Nita flung herself on her knees before him, and raised her lovely face in frantic appeal to his.

"Ronald, Ronald, I am innocent. No one believed me then—not even the counsel who defended me—and I was helpless—so young—only a child, just seventeen. Ronald,

believe me; oh, believe me; I am innocent, Ronald—I—"

Her voice failed her, but the pleading, anguished eyes spoke eloquently.

Into the tense silence fell Gerald's cool, deliberate accents.

"That is a rather large order, Ronald, isn't it? It would be awkward for your wife to meet in Society the judge who condemned her, the counsel who defended or prosecuted her, or any of that house-party of five years ago."

Ronald started up. "I can bear no more," he said, in a stifled voice. "Gerald, I leave you to arrange matters. She—my wife

—must be liberally provided for, but I will never look on her face again."

As the door closed behind him, Nita rose to her feet, and faced Gerald, very pale, but calm and dignified.

"I will accept no allowance," she said quietly, "and I will never cross my husband's path again. Let a cab be called for me and some wrap brought to cover this mockery," glancing down for a moment at her wedding-dress, "and I will go out of your lives for ever."

Gerald Hilton had not a particularly grateful disposition, but at this moment he felt inclined to fervently thank "whatever Powers there be" for this most unexpected turn in his brother's affairs.

He had always hoped that Ronald would remain unmarried. Knowing his twin's sensitive, ultra-refined nature, he calculated that it would be almost impossible to find a Society woman of to-day who would not jar on it, and Ronald being as delicate in health and organisation as Gerald was robust, the latter had always reckoned on succeeding to the title and estates enjoyed by his senior by ten minutes.

When Ronald, at barely twenty-six, found his ideal woman, Gerald's hopes had fled, but now his prospects seemed brighter than ever. Ronald was married, certainly, but to an impossible woman, from whom he had separated almost literally at the church-door. Yet he was not in a position to get a separation, and could not marry anyone else.

The one fear was that he might forgive the woman whose sin had not been against him, except in her concealment of it, who was so beautiful and whom he loved. Therefore, Gerald's work must be to keep the two apart. This proved an easy matter. From Nita came neither word nor sign, and Ronald never mentioned her name.

"Where are those picture-books for the little one who was burnt at Smithers'? I'm going there now," said the Reverend Harry Searle, bustling into the pretty, cosy little room where Peggy sat at needlework, with her son and heir in the high chair at her side. She looked up with just the old, bright smile.

"Benita took them to her this morning with some fruit and jelly," she answered. "Auntie Nita never forgets the children, does she, Boykins?" And Boykins nodded a golden head in corroboration.

Three years had passed since that terrible wedding-day. Nita had sought refuge with her friends, the Carpenters, and told them the whole miserable story.

She had been but a child of seventeen when, staying with a married sister, she had been accused of the theft of Mrs. Harcourt's jewellery, and a bracelet belonging to that lady was found among Nita's own trinkets.

She had borrowed the key of Mrs. Harcourt's box where the jewel-case was kept on the pretext that the lock of her own Saratoga was hampered, and she wanted to try if Mrs. Harcourt's would open it.

When accused, she only cried piteously, and protested her innocence. Found guilty, and condemned to a term of imprisonment, she was disowned by her family—she had no mother, poor child—and thrown on the world with a capital of fifty pounds sent her in a cruel letter by her father. Before this sum was exhausted, a sudden turn of fortune's wheel threw her into Mrs. Carpenter's hands, and from that time the world had gone well with her.

Peggy had married Harry Searle a few weeks after Nita's marriage, and Nita went with the young couple to the large East-end parish where there was work enough for all who cared to help others. There Nita found balm to heal her wounded heart, or at least to still its aching, and the poor people grew to love and trust her, and to look on her almost as an angel. Sister Benita she was called, for she found it wise to wear the uniform of a sisterhood working in the neighbourhood.

"Yes, Nita has gone to see after that poor baby," went on Peggy, "so do sit down and rest a little. You need not go out again till after lunch, need you? You and Nita are terrible people—not a bit of repose in either of you."



Her husband laughed, as he dropped into a seat, and began to help the baby to build a brick castle.

"Well, I can spare an hour or so, if Nita's gone to Smithers', By-the-by, Loughton's back from South Africa."

"I know, and without a wound or hurt of any kind. Nita's mind must be more at ease now the war is over."

"You think she loves him still?" asked Harry.

"Oh, yes, and always will. I wish he could have believed in her innocence as we do."

"She ought to have told him her story before she accepted him," said Harry, very soberly, and he rose and began to pace the room. "The finding out that she had gone by a false name in the way he did was a great shock. I don't think we can blame him."

"Don't you think things will ever come right then?" asked his little wife wistfully.

"Yes, I believe they will, but we must wait. If Nita could ever be proved innocent, he would forgive her concealment of her past, no doubt, but I'm afraid that will never be."

"They were both silent for a time."

"Well, I must go and see that poor woman I told you of last night," said Harry, rousing himself at last.

"What woman?"

"Julia Bazaroff. She has led a terrible life, and is dying of cancer. She has been a thief all her life, she tells me, and belonged to a gang of foreign criminals such as are the pest of the East-end of London. She used to get a place as lady's-maid by means of references supplied by these scoundrels, and then rob her employers. I promised to bring you to see her. Will you come now?"

Peggy was soon ready, and the husband and wife went off together. Julia Bazaroff was a mere skeleton of a woman, and terribly near death. Her former friends had all deserted her, and she was grateful to Peggy for her visit.

It was so lonely, she said, and she was nervous alone, and had so much on her conscience. She was eager to confess her misdeeds to the sympathetic little woman who had no word of reproach for her.

These misdeeds were all much alike; stories of thefts, places obtained by fraud, burglars admitted to the premises; deeds which sometimes resulted in prison, but more often not, for she had been very expert and skilful, contriving frequently to implicate, or at least cast suspicion, on innocent fellow servants. She was very penitent, she said, and felt deep remorse.

"But the worst thing I ever did, and the thing I'm sorriest for," she began again, after a pause, "is this. I once got a girl, quite young, and a lady, sent to prison for a theft I had committed. She was such a pretty young thing, too."

"My mistress was a careless woman, who used to leave her keys about, and was so easy to rob that it wasn't any credit to do it. She took me with her on a visit to a country house, and there I robbed her of her jewellery."

"I managed to put the blame on the sister of the lady of the house, a bit of a half-grown thing, as unsuspicious and confiding as a baby. I put a lock of hers wrong, and advised her to borrow a key of my mistress to try, and when it wouldn't do, and she went to put back the key, I got her lock all right and slipped in a bracelet. Poor child, her eyes still haunt me!"

"Good Heavens! Are you talking of Benita Bennet?" burst in Harry, jumping up in excitement.

"That was her name. Do you know her?"

"Indeed, I do, Julia; if you are really penitent you will repeat your statement to the husband of that unfortunate lady. He discovered that she had been in prison for theft, and discarded her."

"Yes, I'll do that," answered the sick woman, wearily. "No punishment could be worse than the pain I'm suffering now, and I shall soon be gone anyhow."

Her eyes were glazed with pain and the approaching end, and Harry thought it prudent to write out her confession at once, and get her to sign it before two witnesses fetched from another room. Then he turned to his wife.

"Loughton's in town now," he said, "so I'll wire to him to come here at once, and I'll leave a message at home for Nita to come on to you as soon as she gets back."

Nita arrived before Harry returned, and thinking Peggy wanted someone to nurse a dying woman, as frequently happened, came dressed in her sister's garb, and went straight up to the bed.

Julia stared up at her.

"Little Miss Benita," she said feebly, "don't you know me? Julia; Mrs. Harcourt's maid."

Nita shuddered.

"Yes," she said, in a low tone, "I remember. It brings that awful, horrible time back to me. Poor soul, how ill you look! And you are Julia, who was so strong and brisk."

Peggy silently put Julia's confession into Nita's hands.

"Forgive, forgive," pleaded the dying woman, as she watched her victim's face.

"Oh, it's too much, I know; you can't forgive," she added, despairingly, as Nita gave the paper back. But the injured girl bent over the woman who had blighted her young life, and answered softly, "I forgive, Julia; I forgive as I hope to be forgiven."

Harry was a long time absent. Instead of wiring to Lord Loughton he had decided on going for him, and asking him to come and hear the dying confession of a woman who knew something of his wife. Ronald's whole heart was yearning for the wife he had cast aside, and he gladly accompanied Harry in the vague hope that some good news might await him. He entered with his guide to find a dead woman on a bed, and a sister of mercy kneeling by the pillow. His old friend Peggy came to meet him, and handed him the dying confession of Julia Bazaroff. He cast his eyes over it, and uttered a cry of exceeding anguish.

"Oh, my wife, my innocent, martyred Nita!" he cried. "Oh, how shall I find her, how shall I gain her forgiveness? She can never forgive me; I can never hope she will."

The sister of mercy rose from her knees and came forward. "Ronald," was all she said.

"Nita, Nita, be more generous to me than I was to you, Grant me your forgiveness."

And with a sweet, grave smile she put her hands in his.

"We will not talk of forgiveness. There is nothing that I could not forgive you, for I love you, Ronald."

Vera Serkoff.

OUR NEW SERIAL

which will start in a few weeks' time, is a tale of intense dramatic and love interest. The plot is entirely new, and will be dealt with by Mr. R. Norman Silver in his usual powerful way. The element of love enters very strongly into the story. No lover of fiction should fail to read this tale, which will start in the issue of Short Stories dated March 7th. Readers will remember that, among other things, Mr. Silver contributed "The Golden Dwarf," "Tales Told Off Duty," and "The Brains of the Force" to Short Stories. It will be well for you to place your orders early for the March 7th. Short Stories, as besides the Serial there will be other new and attractive features which are sure to occasion a great run on the paper.





PIETRO'S DREAM OF LOVE.

The Story of a Brave Little Italian Boy.

His name was Pietro Antonini, it on his little fruit cart, painted big, yellow letters, "Pietro Fruiterer."

Pietro was very proud of that cart with his own name on it, bright mornings he stood behind it with the conscious air of a man of property, feeling that the world was a very pleasant place.

But there was one great sorrow in Pietro's life. His left leg was twisted and shrunken and short, and when he walked, at every step he gave a sudden plunge downwards to the left, very much as if he had stooped to pick up something and then thought better of it.

Many times, as a child, he had wondered why his father seemed to dislike him, until one day he heard him answer gruffly to somebody's question, "No, I have no children; only a cripple." Then he understood, and the iron entered his childish soul, and the scar remained through all his life.

With the advent of the cart the bitterness of being useless departed. It is no wonder that he loved the cart. Still he felt keenly that he was different from other people. Oh! the anguish of isolation in "being different!"

Pietro had established his cart on Vere Street and College Street, and the children from Vere Street school patronised him daily. At first they had laughed at his grotesque gait and called him "Jumping-Jack." One day a lady, who was one of the teachers in the Vere Street school, found him in tears, and her tender sympathy drew out the cause of his trouble.

"Do not cry, Pietro," she said. "You are handsomer than any of them. You have beautiful soft dark eyes like a woman's, and you have black, silken curls that anyone might envy. And you have something that is more than all these things, you have a beautiful soul."

Pietro listened and was glad to know this; but what were silken curls and a beautiful soul compared with strong, straight legs? And he put his head down on the edge of the cart. That was two years ago, when he was only fourteen. He never cried now. He only folded his lips very tight, and if the tears sometimes filled his dark eyes they never fell, and one would not call that crying, would one?

In June, when school closed, Pietro moved his cart to a new corner. On the second morning two young girls on their way to work stopped beside his cart while a waggon passed, and one said to the other, "They say you will marry that Ross, Ninette."

Ninette tossed her head and laughed.

"They are mistaken. Why, he has a club foot. I would never marry a cripple!"

Pietro turned with a sudden pain in his heart and looked at her and thought he had never seen such a merry face, and such white, flashing teeth.

You could see in beautiful, Antonini,

handsome

On fine,

"Besides," added Ninette, with a saucy glance at Pietro "I do not like blondes. I like dark eyes and black curly hair."

Pietro was glad that his box cart hid his shrunken leg so completely, and he smiled back at the girl whose gaiety was so infectious.

Her words lingered with him all day, and in the evening, when she passed on her way home, he stood up very straight on his sound leg, holding the other bent under him, and returned her nod and smile.

The next morning he took his place earlier than usual and polished up his apples, turning their reddest sides outward, and arranged his oranges in a neat heap. He patted the bananas with a loving hand, smiled at the cheerful red apples, and hoped Ninette would notice how nice the cart looked.

She came tripping on alone. "Good morning—Pietro," she added brightly, seeing the name on the cart.

"Good morning, Ninette!" answered Pietro, whereat the girl laughed and nodded her head at him roguishly.

"You are very pretty," said Pietro boldly.

"And you are very impudent," she retorted, smiling, however, as if she liked such impudence.

Pietro felt his heart thrill as he looked into her bright, dark eyes, and he leant over the cart and held out one of his finest oranges. "Will you please, please to take it!" he cried eagerly.

Ninette's face lit up with pleasure, and she took the orange and hurried on her way, turning to press it mischievously to her lips. Pietro was delighted. He did not know that Ninette was a born coquette, and that in spite of her brief years she was an adept in these captivating little arts and graces. His lonely heart went out to this bright-eyed, sparkling, vivacious creature, and every day he watched for her, morning and evening, and stood up very straight until she had passed.

Seven o'clock in the morning and six o'clock in the evening now became the hours for which Pietro lived. All the intervening time was spent waiting, waiting for those "Heavenly hours," as he called them, that brought Ninette.

How the world changed! He no longer noticed the sad faces, the shabby figures that passed him; he found so many happy faces to watch, they seemed in sympathy with him in his joy, just as the sorrowful ones had drawn him in his loneliness.

Even the rainy days that had once been so insupportably dreary became occasions to be looked forward to and rejoiced in, for then he spread a tarpaulin tent-wise over the cart and Ninette came close under its shelter and leant over the cart very near him.

It was under the tent on a rainy day, when Ninette's laughing face was upturned within a foot of his, that Pietro suddenly leant over and kissed her.

"Oh, Ninette, I love you, I love you so! You are the whole world to me! Can you love me a little? Oh, say that you will, and then we'll be married, and I will take care of you always. Ninette, darling, will you?"

Had Ninette been able she would have coyly eluded Pietro and made him wait several days in tantalising suspense for his answer, but he held her hands tightly in his and his grave, dark eyes searched her face in their earnestness, so she said soberly, "Yes, Pietro, I will."

Pietro did not sleep that night. From heights of ecstatic happiness he plunged into depths of despair, for had not Ninette said that she would never marry a cripple, and he, weak, miserable coward that he was, had with infinite care concealed from her his deformity. He had seen her only on week days behind his cart and she had never guessed.

Ah, merciful saints, how could he tell her now and see her turn from him in horror! He remembered how as a little fellow he had prayed the Blessed Virgin every night for a month to heal his crippled leg, and every morning had slowly drawn it forth from under the coverlet with breathless expectancy, ready to look with awe upon the miracle, and each time overwhelmed with the keenest disappointment; until at last his faith had wavered, and in his passionate despair he had smashed his little statue of the Virgin, and then spent many hours in bitter repentance for his sin.

He knelt now and prayed with fervour. He did not expect a miracle, but who knew what might happen?

The days passed and still he could not bring himself to tell Ninette. A few more days of happiness, he said, just one more day.

How he hated himself! Yet how could he bear to give up Ninette? He did not dare to hope that she would love him after the disclosure.

One rainy evening they stood together under the tent, the light from the electric globe on the corner falling upon the gleaming wet pavements and trying in vain to pierce the fog that was silently enveloping the city.

Drops of mist like little pearls clung to Ninette's black hair and the red scarf she had pushed back from her forehead. Pietro's heart swelled painfully.

"Oh, Ninette!" he cried. "How beautiful you are! Your eyes are like the stars. I don't deserve you, I don't deserve you!"

"You say that so often, Pietro," Ninette answered. "I am sure I don't know why. The girls at the shop think you are the handsomest boy they have ever seen. They are, oh, so jealous and envious. And, Pietro, to-morrow is Sunday and you must come and see me. I have told my mother all about you and she wants to see you. Don't say that you don't deserve me! I am not so good as you, Pietro."

The words went to Pietro's heart like a stab and his lips whitened.

"Ninette, oh, Ninette! We can't be married. I have deceived you. Oh, Ninette, it was because I loved you so, I could not bear to tell you. You could not love a cripple, and—I am only a cripple. Look!"

He came out from behind the cart and hobbled rapidly up and down the wet pavement, his grotesque figure and jerky plunging gait looming curiously through the foggy twilight. He did not spare himself now, in a feverish eagerness of self-abasement he exhibited his deformity in all its ugliness.

"That is why I always stayed behind the cart. That is why I never saw you on Sunday evenings! See how I hobble! Oh, I am a wretch!" His words died away in a cry. "Oh, Ninette, don't hate me for it!"

Ninette looked on in horror and amazement. Could this wretched little, jerking cripple be her Pietro, the Pietro who always stood up so straight behind his cart and looked so tall and handsome that the girls envied her? Ah, what would the girls say? A cripple! She put up her hand and hid her face to shut out the dreadful sight.

Pietro's outstretched arms dropped to his side, the pleading look died out of his beautiful eyes; if deep in his heart he had

retained a little hope that Ninette might still love him, it was gone now.

"Ninette," he said, quietly, "I give your promise back to you. I know you are not for me." His voice quivered a little. "But don't be unhappy about me. You can go away and never see me again. You must go, Ninette."

"Yes, I will go away," said Ninette drearily. "It is not your fault, Pietro, and I don't hate you for it; but I can't stay—now. Oh, no, no. I could not! Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

Pietro stood and watched her slim figure disappear in the grey mist, the light falling upon his white face and clasped hands, and upon his tented cart, and the slippery, glistening wet pavements, and the shadowy figures moving through the foggy night.

Darkness had likewise descended upon his heart and upon his bright dream of happiness. After a time he moved back to his cart and began putting away his wares.

Then, something happened. A wild scream pierced the air, a noise of flying hoots and tearing wheels filled the street, and people scurried hither and thither as a carriage drawn by two terrified horses came swinging along at a frightful pace.

One instant Pietro shrank back against his cart, the next he had sprung at the horses' heads and was clinging to the bridle.

His light figure swayed to and fro, the hot breath of the horses fanning his face, their loud snorting filling his ears like a roar. A few more plunges, then a crash and a pause, and Pietro lay white and still beneath the horses' feet.

A dozen hands grasped the heads of the trembling animals and lifted the poor little bruised form from the ground. A spark of life still flickered fitfully, and they bore him to the great hospital near by. Brave they said he was, but it was only reckless bravery.

He opened his eyes after his leg had been set and his head and arm bandaged, but suffered silently and uncomplainingly. That was a strong proof of bravery.

Two days he lay, white and listless, sinking slowly, and the doctor said quietly to the nurse, "There is no hope."

Pietro knew, but he smiled faintly and looked up with wide, wistful dark eyes. He was not afraid to die.

On the third day came a little black-haired Italian girl, with a red scarf wound about her head, and demanded to see Pietro.

The doctor warned her not to excite the patient, and she walked quietly by his side to the bed, then she threw herself on her knees and flung her arms around Pietro's neck and kissed him again and again.

"Oh, Pietro!" she cried. "It is you that I love, you, you, you. It is your eyes, yourself! You are so brave, so good! I will never leave you any more!"

The astonished doctor tried to drag her away by force, but she refused to stir, and Pietro held her close. What did they care for the doctor?

The august personage stood alarmed and helpless, his authority set at naught, his anger defied.

"It will certainly kill him," he said to the nurse, whose eyes were wet with tears.

But the doctor was wrong. Pietro recovered.

Venita
Seibert.





= A = Daughter's Devotion.

The Tale of a Sacrifice of Love and
Ambition.

"Why, father is going off to Hambleton!" thought Jean Southwell in surprise, as she looked across the yard of the old farm and saw her father getting into the dog-cart. "He didn't tell me he was going, and he told me that I should go with him if he went before market day!" she murmured disappointedly.

She tripped from the room into the open and across the grass towards the yard in order to interrogate her father, but she slackened her steps as she became aware of the fact that Mr. Spilling, the solicitor from the nearest village and an old friend of her father, was climbing into the conveyance. She was mystified, but the feeling of vexation that her father should have forgotten his promise mastered all other sentiments and she hurried on again.

She reached the gate just as the dog-cart passed. Mr. Spilling raised his hat gallantly; Mr. Southwell glanced at his daughter as if he were not quite conscious of her presence, and the trap went past her and down the somewhat rough lane that led to the high road.

Jean could hardly credit her senses. Her father was so fond of her that it was past belief that he could treat her so unkindly. Disappointment gave place to sadness at her father's off-hand manner and, with tears welling to her eyes, she returned to the house to seek her mother.

"What is the matter with you, Jean?" asked Mrs. Southwell, with assumed cheerfulness hardly in accord with the girl's distress.

The cheerfulness was so apparently unreal that it increased Jean's trouble.

"What is the matter with father—and you, mother?" inquired the girl anxiously. "Father has gone off to Hambleton with Mr. Spilling, and you know that he promised to take me; but he scarcely noticed me as he passed and now you—Oh, mother, dear, what is it?"

Mrs. Southwell would have liked to keep up the attempted deception, but she saw that it would be useless to pacify Jean by evasive replies. "The best course was to break the news to the girl as gently as possible."

"Jean," she said earnestly, folding her only child in her arms, "you must not be vexed with your father for passing you. He is in great trouble, dear, great trouble, and he has gone with the lawyer to see—"

"Trouble, mother?" Jean returned, wonderingly. "What is it?"

So far as Jean had ever known, things had gone very smoothly at the farm; her childhood had been a sunny one, farming had been remunerative—at least, she had not been aware of any scarcity of money, she had had all she wanted in moderation and the Southwells were regarded as prosperous. What was the trouble? The presence of the lawyer suggested that money had something to do with it, yet the last year's crops had been good and had sold well.

Mrs. Southwell hesitated and her lips quivered; it was so hard to see this fresh young face, surmounted with the wealth of dark brown hair, clouded with sorrow.

"Your father has been unlucky in various ways, Jean, and misfortunes never come singly. A long time ago he became

security for a debt incurred by his brother, who died soon afterwards, and to meet his obligations he had to mortgage the farm and the implements. Lately, other troubles have befallen us, and now the crisis had come. He must raise £200 within the next week or—" Mrs. Southwell's voice faltered and she could not continue; she could only stroke the mass of hair and try to prevent her own tears from falling too fast.

"Two hundred pounds!" echoed Jean. "That is a lot, but surely there are people who would lend him that money! I have heard people talk of their credit being good for such or such an amount, and surely father's good name is sufficient!"

"You do not know the world, my dear!" sighed her mother. "And your head was not intended for business—not yet, at any rate! A man's credit is good when he has something to offer as security, or when people think he has; but your father would not borrow on false pretences, even if he could, and he has nothing to offer as security. Everything is mortgaged, even the furniture! He has gone to see if he can, by any chance, find someone who will help him on the strength of his character as a hard-working, scrupulously honest man; if not—"

"What?" demanded Jean, looking up in fear.

"We shall be sold up and have to leave the farm!" replied Mrs. Southwell. But the next instant she cried: "No, no! Let us hope that it will not be so bad as that! I cannot bear to think of it!"

Mrs. Southwell gave way and wept silently. They had tried to hide this coming sorrow from Jean, striving to keep bright in front of her and hoping to ward off the threatened blow; but it had come at last. It was Jean's turn, after a few seconds of silent weeping, to make an attempt to play the part of comforter.

"Perhaps father will get the money, or someone will guarantee it!" she cried, kissing her mother tenderly. "It must be so!"

Mrs. Southwell dried her eyes and set to work resolutely on her daily duties, bidding Jean take heart and forget all till her father returned.

"Perhaps it will be as you say, Jean dear! Surely we shall be spared the sorrow of leaving the old home!"

Jean went to her own little room, seated herself in a plain, but cosy armchair and became absorbed in thought. If this thing happened, then it meant more to her than appeared on the surface, more than her parents suspected. Nay, the blow had already fallen!

She shuddered as she remembered. Percy Morton's father would never let him marry the daughter of a man in such low water as Robert Southwell; if Percy insisted, then his tyrannical father would cut him off and Jean would never permit her lover to make such a sacrifice! Morton had already intimated that he was not pleased with his son's attention to Jean, because he wanted the young fellow to marry someone in a much better position; he had said that in order to nip in the bud any growing affection that might be springing up between the two, but neither he nor the Southwells knew the exact circumstances. Jean was so happy that she scarcely knew for herself. She experienced a strange thrill when Percy approached, and, understanding old Morton's intention to see that his son married a woman in good circumstances, she had formulated plans in a vague manner. And now it all came home to her with cruel clearness.

She loved Percy; this sorrow seemed to have awakened her to the full consciousness of the fact. And Percy loved her, she was sure of it! Yesterday evening he had spoken so tenderly, so lovingly to her, and she half-fared that he was about to seal a lover's compact by bestowing upon her the first kiss, but the gamekeeper coming round the bend in the lane had caused them both to assume a very demure aspect.

Jean felt her face reddening as she lived those few seconds over again. Jean Southwell, the only child of a fairly well-to-do farmer was not really good enough for old Morton, but Jean Southwell, the daughter of a bankrupt, was an impossibility!

And the plans she had thought of—ah, they would fall to the ground if her father could not raise the money! She stared into space, and the darkness came on and enveloped her, but she knew it not.

She aroused herself to find her limbs stiff and cold, as she heard the sound of the dog-cart. She crept downstairs and waited for her father to enter the cosy parlour. The fire was burning brightly, the lamp was alight, and the tea was ready. How happy they would all be over this evening meal if he had succeeded! How she would work to help him to clear off this incubus! And if he had failed? She tried to banish the thought, but her heart sank like lead when he entered, for the sight of his face was sufficient. He sat down in his chair, refusing the cup of tea which his loving wife offered him—sat with his face hard set and stared at the opposite wall. Jean watched him, the tea was forgotten and the hours went by in silence.

The grandfather clock struck ten, the strokes echoing all through the house. Mrs. Southwell touched Jean on the shoulder and motioned her to retire for the night. Jean arose, walked to her father and threw herself upon him clasping her arms round his neck and kissing him again and again.

"Dear, dear father! Let me help you to bear this sorrow! I am no longer little Jean; I am a woman and can aid you in your trouble!"

"Heaven sent you to comfort us, little Jean!" he cried brokenly, as he pressed her to him and returned her caresses. "We are wrong to take this trouble so badly, Jean; your mother and I ought to feel some gratitude for the love of a daughter like our sweet darling! I am a poor man to-night, little one, but I would not exchange your love for all the gold they could bring me. Mother," he added, turning to his wife, his face lighting up with great joy for the time, "come and share the love which is poured out to us from the heart of our daughter!"

Jean slept little that night; her brain was on fire and she cried again and again as she saw the sweet visions of other days fading away, but by the time that the tardy sun shot its rays into the bedroom she had settled upon the course to be pursued and was firm in her intention to adopt it.

The breakfast was a silent meal, and when it was over the members of the Southwell family went their several ways, to perform their daily duties. An hour later, Jean harnessed her own pony to a light cart and started ostensibly for the village of Felsham; she not infrequently made this journey, and on this occasion her mother was too much absorbed to ask questions.

Once on the road, however, Jean followed the direction that led to Tanwich, a medium-sized town about eleven miles away. Smut, the pony, was a spirited creature, and the envy of many a farmer in the district; Jean knew how to manage her, and the many predictions that the girl would come to grief through driving Smut seemed to be as far from realisation as ever. In rather more than an hour Smut was pulled up outside a small, well-situated house on the farther side of the town, and Jean alighted.

Her knock at the door was answered by a trim maid, who showed Jean into a well-furnished, but very stiff-looking reception-room, while she informed her mistress of Jean's visit. Jean was then conducted upstairs to another room where a thin, stern-visaged woman sat writing a letter.

"Take a seat, Jean," said the lady of the house, in a voice that had no expression, no infection, but was as cold and hard as her face. She did not look up while speaking, but continued the writing of the letter on which she was engaged. "I am busy."

Jean was about to apologise for intruding when the other cut her short.

"Now, what is it?" demanded the lady of the house in the same hard voice when she had finished the letter. "Why

have you come to me? I am not usually troubled, so I suppose you want something."

"Yes, Aunt Jane," replied the girl, flushing painfully. "You were good enough to send me a letter on my birthday last week, promising to give me a good piano and to pay for lessons in music and singing, to finish my musical education and bring out the talent I possess, so you said."

Aunt Jane nodded. Not a muscle of the set face moved; it was like stone, and appeared to have lost the power of changing its expression. Emotion of any kind seemed not to affect Aunt Jane, and her features remained fixed like those of a mask. She was the maiden sister of Jean's father, and brother and sister had quarrelled soon after Jean's birth: no one knew the cause of the quarrel exactly, but they had never met, except by accident, since that time and they had never exchanged a word since then.

Jane Southwell had been godmother to her niece, and that was how the girl's name came to be Jean. Miss Southwell had suggested her own name, Jane, but the suggestion was not entirely approved, and a compromise was arranged by transposing the letters to make "Jean."

"How much did you intend to pay for the piano, Aunt Jane?" asked the girl hesitatingly.

"Fifty pounds," replied Miss Southwell, after a long pause, during which Jean's heart beat very quickly.

"And how much did you think of expending on lessons?" was Jean's next inquiry.

There was another pause, and Miss Southwell replied: "Possibly one hundred pounds."

Jean clasped her hands in mingled joy and fear.

"Aunt Jane," she said earnestly, "would you give me the money—now—instead of the piano and the lessons?"

"Explain yourself!" was the cold rejoinder.

"Father is in difficulties, and unless he raises two hundred pounds within the next few days, we shall be sold up, and have to leave the farm. He cannot raise the money. I have thought it all out, and I am trying to raise it myself."

"And give up all the prospects that stretch out before you? You have the talent that will make a celebrated singer and musician. You have no right to spoil your future for the sake of anyone," declared Miss Southwell.

"I will give up anything and everything for my father and my mother!" asserted Jean stoutly, although the thought of giving up the cherished ambition almost caused her to falter. Oh, it was hard! "I have thought it all out."

"You have thought that I would do this, instead of what I offered to do?" continued Aunt Jane. "And I suppose you have also included in your calculations a vague notion that I would, a little later, give you a piano and pay for lessons all the same, so you would get the money for your father and get the benefits for yourself in addition?"

It was a cruel speech, such as could come only from a man or woman soured by time and loneliness. Jean sprang to her feet with a cry of protest.

"I would not accept the benefits from you afterwards if you offered them on your bended knees, Aunt Jane!" she cried hotly. "I would not accept even the promised gifts, after that speech, but for the sake of my parents!"

"Bravo!" exclaimed a voice near the door. "Well, said, Jean!"

Both women turned and beheld Percy Morton, who had entered unobserved, and had heard the latter portion of the conversation. He crossed to Jean and took her in his arms, despite her struggles.

"Miss Southwell," he said, respectfully but firmly, "you have no right to speak to her like that!"

"And you have no right to interfere!" snapped Miss Southwell. "And no right to enter till you had a reply to your knock. Leave me to settle my family matters as I think fit."

"Yes, yes, go!" said Jean hurriedly, as the manly young fellow was about to reply. "Please go, do!"

Percy Morton left the room and went downstairs to wait till Miss Southwell was disengaged and could attend to the particular business that he had to deal with. He had not

heard enough to understand Jean's trouble, but he could easily tell that she was in deep trouble and he was anxious.

Miss Southwell bent a scrutinising glance on Jean, who had dropped into a chair and buried her face in her hands. There was just the faintest indication of a change in the stony countenance for a moment, but it quickly vanished. She took a cheque-book from a drawer and wrote out a cheque for £150. Then she spoke.

"Here is the money!" she said, when she had finished. "Take it!" as Jean held out her hand and began to pour out her thanks. "And remember, as you cash this, that you are giving away the natural gifts with which you have been endowed."

Poor Jean did not need to be reminded of the fact, but she accepted the cheque with deep thankfulness. Aunt Jane would not listen to her expression of gratitude; but, just as Jean was about to close the door behind her, the older woman recalled her niece.

"Jean," asked Miss Southwell softly, as the girl stood wonderingly in front of her, "do you think you could kiss me?"

Jean hesitated for a second through sheer amazement, then stooped and kissed the thin lips willingly.

Scarcely comprehending what she was about, Jean ran down the stairs towards the front door, but a detaining hand was placed on her shoulder.

"What is it, Jean?" asked Percy Morton. "Why are you running away without telling me?"

"Oh, Percy," cried the girl, the bitterness of the sacrifice coming home to her again. "I cannot tell you. I must go!"

The maid came up to say that Miss Southwell would see him, and Jean darted away. She was in the trap and off at a gallop.

Smut's sides were all of a lather when she reached the lane leading to the farm, and she was making for the entrance when Jean pulled the rein and sent her onward along the road. In three minutes they had reached the Kiln Farm, where she asked for Mr. Ince.

"Hallo, Miss Jean!" said Ince heartily. "What is it now?"

"How much will you give for this pony?" asked Jean slowly. "You have often said you wanted it."

"Now, now," said Ince deprecatingly. "How many more times are you going to tease me like that?"

"This is a genuine offer, Mr. Ince," returned the girl quietly. "The mare belongs to me, and I want some money badly. How much will you give?"

"If it's a deal, then I'll give you £30!" said Ince promptly. "It's a good price, but she's a good animal, and my gal has set her heart on one like it."

"Give me the money and she's yours! You can send for her this afternoon."

"Done!" said Ince. Then, as an uneasy thought came to him, he added: "You aren't going to do nothing wrong—I mean, you aren't—I say, Miss Jean, honour bright, you aren't going to clope or run away from home and be silly with the money, eh?"

Jean laughed so merrily, in momentary amusement, that the farmer was reassured, and departed somewhat shamefacedly to write out the cheque. That was rather a laborious task for him, but he accomplished it in five minutes and brought it to her.

"I haven't got it in gold, Miss Jean, but that's as good if it's got my name at the bottom, which it has! I expect you can't give me a receipt for it?"

"I'll send one with the mare, when you have her fetched away!" said Jean. "Good morning, Mr. Ince."

The farmer looked after her doubtfully; he was still doubtful whether it was a merry trick of Jean, but he comforted himself with the reflection that the afternoon would soon arrive and the matter be settled. As she had accepted the money, he could probably enforce the completion of the transaction.

Jean reached home and unharassed Smut. She threw her arms round the creature's neck and laid her head against Smut's, crying bitterly.

"Oh, Smut, Smut, I have sold you! Can you ever forgive me? But it was for their sake!"

She entered the house and went straight to her mother.

"Mother, dear, when father comes in to dinner give him these—from me!"

She handed to her mother the envelope in which Ince had placed his cheque; it now contained the two cheques which she had received that morning, and four £5 notes of her own money. The envelope was sealed, but Mrs. Southwell guessed that it contained the wherewithal to save them. Jean hurried away before her mother could make inquiry, and she waited for her father to come in from the fields. Waiting she fell into a reverie; she realised now the extent of her sacrifice. On the walls of her bedroom were portraits of Patti, Jenny Lind, and other great singers, with counterfeit presentments of great musicians. She almost worshipped music, those who could produce it and those who could give expression to it. She herself was gifted, and now her chance of developing the talent was gone! And her lover was lost to her also; the path that had opened itself before her, but was now closed by her own act, would have secured the consent of old Morton, to whom celebrity would have been like strong wine.

"Jean!"

It was her father's voice; but not as she had expected to hear it. Stern, harsh, it was; not affectionate and grateful. She went down, and found him with his hat on.

"Jean, where, why did you borrow this money? You have gone to my sister, who will glory in my misfortune; you have gone to my neighbours. They have all lent the money, because they thought me solvent or in order to degrade me. I will not borrow of those people, and you should not have lowered me in this way. I will return it myself. Tell me where you got the notes, so that I may return those also!"

"Father, it is not borrowed!" said Jean, gently. "It is all my own money. Let me tell you!"

She told him. Robert Southwell folded his daughter in his arms, and, when the lump in his throat had decreased sufficiently to permit speech, he said:

"Bless you, Jean! You make me proud of my offspring!"

That very afternoon Mr. Southwell went off to Hambleton to pay his debt and gain a further respite. There was time now for him to pick up and meet other liabilities as they became due, and he might ultimately free himself. But he did not stop at Hambleton, and it was late at night when he returned.

Jean's efforts had weakened her, and she was ill for a week, but the loving care of her mother hastened the recovery. When she descended to the parlour for the first time she saw a splendid piano there, and on the lid was a note addressed to her. Opening it, she saw that it was in the handwriting of Aunt Jane; it read—

"Please accept this from one whose exterior is of stone, but who has discovered that she has a heart, owing to a great act of self-sacrifice made by another! Accept this from one who offers it on her bended knees!"

"Poor aunt! Dear aunt!" murmured Jean brokenly. Then her ears caught a sound that made her start. "Smut!" she gasped.

"Yes, Jean, the mare is outside, ready to be stroked by her mistress," said her father joyfully. "Aunt Jane said I was to buy her back at any cost, and old Ince parted with it because it was for you."

Jean walked slowly to the pony, which showed its delight at being near its mistress once more.

"Your aunt is a good woman under her stony surface, Jean," said Mr. Southwell gravely. "And that hardness is due partly to me and partly to the cruelty of Fate, which deprived her of her lover by death. I ought not to have been so easily offended, and I ought never to have left her to pass so many years in loneliness! She has softened now, and has heaped coals of fire on my head by setting me up again, paying off the mortgage and otherwise assisting me. And it is all through your actions. They all know what you did, and even old Morton said I had a daughter to be proud of. Fancy that! Why, here he comes, and Percy with him! I declare, mother, Jean is blushing!"

D. Merriam.

ASTOUNDING SOCIETY REVELATIONS.

HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA.

By Lady Peggy Carstairs.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

LADY PEGGY CARSTAIRS. A widow, who, having lost all her money in a bank failure, undertakes to chaperon Belinda.

BELINDA NORTH. The beautiful daughter of Hardy North, an Australian millionaire.

DUKE OF EASTACRES. A comparatively penniless suitor for Belinda's hand.

DAVID CARR. A young engineer, with whom Belinda is in love.

STANLEY FORBES. A famous barrister.

SHEILA KENWYN. Forbes' cousin, whom Eastacres has wronged.

ALPHONSE HERVÉ. An eminent French artist in love with Belinda.

PRINCESS VERA ZOULOFF. A celebrated Russian beauty.

BARON ROLLA. An extremely wealthy Parisian, in love with Belinda.



We Stay at Trouville.

I didn't show Hervé what I felt, but greeted him with an easy smile.

"Where are you staying?" I asked. "And who would have expected such an apostle of the Romantic to come to a place so worldly as Trouville?"

"I am with the Baron at his château—you know it, Lady Peggy, the most charming place in France. Rolla will be delighted to hear you are so near; he will insist on your coming to his place at once."

"The Baron is always charming," I said effusively. "Tell me, Alphonse, what are you doing to-day? Can you spare me a few hours? I want a talk with you."

"I am at your service," he said gallantly. "Where shall we go?"

He glanced along the sea front, with its mob of great ladies and adventuresses, princes and blacklegs, reigning sovereigns and famous actresses, and gave a shrug at the mass of varicoloured, noisy life.

"Come to the hotel," I said. "We can speak there in peace."

I had a long and somewhat trying interview with the artist. It was my object, of course, to forestall Belinda's appeal to him on Vera's—or rather her own—behalf. I knew Hervé very well; as I have said before, I had had opportunities of studying his character in the days before Fame had discovered him. His was not a temperament that required diplomacy. It was better to come to terms with him at once. I plunged into the subject, and asked him straight out if he still cared for Belinda.

He smiled whimsically, and talked in an airy fashion of the sea and the sun, comparing the girl, I suppose, to them.

"Whether you love her or not, Alphonse," I said abruptly, "I am sure of one thing. You would not let your feeling interfere with your regard or respect for another woman?"

He gave a gesture of protest.

"The thought is impossible," he said.

I smiled. Then, in a few brief words, I told him how matters stood.

"The Princess is so foolish as to care for this engineer—this David Carr, and he reciprocates her attachment. Belinda

is confident that it is merely a passing aberration on Vera's part, and thinks that if you would use your influence, and reason with the Princess, she would——"

He interrupted me passionately.

"No," he cried, "a thousand times no. The suggestion is intolerable. I could not offer such an insult to the woman. I—forgive me," he said, gravely. "I spoke with heat. Explain to Miss North, if you will have the goodness, that I should not dare to approach the Princess on such an errand."

I nodded acquiescence, and, shortly after, he departed, bearing all sorts of friendly greetings to the Baron.

That evening I received an invitation for myself and Belinda to Rolla's château, *La Caprice*. I mentioned it to Belinda, telling her at the same time that Alphonse Hervé was there.

"He asked me to tell you," I said quietly, "that he should not dare to approach the Princess on such an errand as you mentioned in your letter."

She flushed and bit her lip.

"I did not write as carefully as I should," she said. "It is difficult to express one's exact meaning on paper sometimes. He will understand better when I speak to him."

"I should not advise you to mention the topic," I replied.

Belinda was unshaken in her determination, however, but, as I could with safety leave the result of her appeal with Hervé, I did not continue the dispute.

Early next morning we started for *La Caprice*. For beauty and loveliness the château has no equal, even among the many summer holiday houses up and down the green coast. This year it was very gay and very charming. The Baron and his sister were keeping open house, and it was full of people. White-sailed yachts anchored in the bay, riding parties and driving parties made its avenues bright with colour and movement; groups of exquisitely-dressed women wandered in its gardens; life went like a song.

As for our amusements, they were many and varied. There was a troupe of actors from Paris for its theatre, concerts at which artistes world-famous, violinists, *prima donne*, tenors, performed for our delight.

Every evening at nine o'clock a stately dinner, like a royal banquet, was served to the accompaniment of music, which was worthy of more attention than we gave it. Then there were moonlight water parties, fishing parties, and later on

DAVID GARR



shooting parties, not serious and engrossing, as in England, but animated and picturesque.

Then there were card parties, held for the most part in our own rooms, at which we lost and gained fortunes with a shrill laugh and a shrug of the shoulders, with champagne as an accompaniment. Mrs. Dawtrey, the latest thing in English beauties, and her rival, Sarah Givins—a girl from Yankeeland, gave one or two vastly amusing receptions.

Sarah, known as "Toffy," because her father made his pile in molasses, on one occasion performed a skirt dance, clad in a *risqué* costume of gossamer; Mrs. Dawtrey, a truly wonderful woman, who, having passed her fortieth birthday, con-

trived to look like twenty, following with an exhibition of her skill with a pocket-pistol. Tilting her chair on two legs, she leant back, a cigarette in her mouth, and took shots at the crystal drops on the chandelier.

Each drop as it fell, and shivered in atoms on the floor, was greeted by shrieks of applause. She certainly was a wonderful shot, and when, having exhausted the chandelier, she turned her attention to the pictures on the walls, and neatly sent a bullet through a masterpiece of Corot, why, as Toffy said, it was good for trade.

After all, the great thing to avoid in life is boredom, and Mrs. Dawtrey, with her pretty, foolish, painted face, her false curls in a sunny circlet above her kohl-washed eyes, with her heart set on a cotillion, and her name in the mouths of the clubs, never bored one.

As for her manners, well, you middle-class people might pronounce her vulgar, we say she was *chic*. It is not what you do in Society, but the way you do it; and when she and Toffy chased Reggie, the Baron, and half a dozen other men down the corridors at three in the morning, with knotted towels, shrieking and screaming at the top of their voices, we applauded to the echo.

It was a gay life at *La Caprice*, but a wearing one. Even my nerves felt the strain, and I was obliged to have recourse to ether. It has a wonderful effect; as the ether moves in your veins your eyes grow brighter, your brain grows clearer, you feel light-hearted, bright as a girl in her teens. One evening I had to take a more than usually large dose.

Then, with the spirit giving me new life, I hastened down to mix in the gay crowd that never pauses, never thinks in its pursuit of pleasure.

I found Belinda talking to Alphonse. She was looking very exquisite, with a proud tilt of her head, and a haughty curve of her lips that well became her. She did not get on at all well with the women at *La Caprice*. I told her that among the guests were some of the greatest ladies of Europe. Her reply was characteristic—

"They paint their faces," she said scornfully, "black their eyebrows, and dye their hair. They talk loudly, and talk scandal, and gossip in a shrill voice. I think they're horrid!"

Alphonse seemed to share her thoughts, judging by the glance he cast at Toffy, who, with her feet on an ottoman—showing a liberal allowance of ankle, her hands behind her head, was chaffing a group of men. Toffy was a very lovely young person of transparent colouring, with very small features, and very slight form, with artistically coloured red-gold hair, and a wonderful impertinence. Very few girls would have the courage to adopt such an attitude as hers in a drawing-room, fewer still possess the ankles.

Up to the present Alphonse, with my assistance, had steered clear of a prolonged *tête-à-tête* with Belinda. While still admiring her, his feelings for Belinda had undergone a change. She was no longer a goddess, merely a beautiful young girl. Had she left well alone, and contented herself with various tactful allusions to the Princess, Alphonse might have swung

back to his allegiance to Vera, and so have cleared the way for Belinda's reunion with David. As it was, however, with the painful directness of her character, she plunged into the middle of her subject.

"Alphonse," she said gravely, "have you written to Princess Zouloff of late?"

The artist flushed, and his fine brows met, frowning in quick resentment.

"No, mademoiselle," he said sharply.

"Are you not going to write? Ah," as he showed signs of wishing to end the conversation, "you must hear me out. You think I am wrong in speaking so openly? Believe me, I have no desire to give you pain, or to treat her name with any discourtesy. But," she turned and faced him, a flush tinging the whiteness of her skin, "but, even before you or her I must think of the man I love."

"He is the whole world to me, there is nothing, nothing I would not do for the sake of my love. Won't you help me?" She bent towards the artist with a pleading gesture; "you are brave, and clever, and kind, and I am so young, so helpless in my ignorance, my inexperience."

"David has not changed in his regard for me; do not believe it, whoever tells you to the contrary. He was hurt, I think, at a letter I wrote him, a foolish letter, telling him that if he chose he could consider himself free. He never answered, but," her voice choked, "but the next time I saw him he was—with the Princess."

"And you still believe in him, still believe he cares for you?"

"Yes,"—she spoke proudly—"yes, and shall do until he tells me himself that it is all over."

"You have great faith, mademoiselle."

"And you, monsieur—have you not faith also where you love?"

He shrugged.

"Not like yours," he muttered. "I—I— Listen"—he drew near the girl. "I loved a woman for years, loved her with the passion of an artist, the fervour of a devotee. She deceived me; at least"—he paused—"I had not such faith as you," he said, with a half mocking smile; "and in the face of what I heard and saw, I judged her inconstant and light-minded. Since then, I have not loved until three months ago I met a fair-haired girl with wonderful blue eyes." He gazed at her with meaning and she coloured at his look.

"You didn't really love the girl," she said after a pause.

"Even if you did, you have got over it. Yes, oh yes," she laughed, and laid her fingers on his arm; "you are quite restored now. See, you do not even change colour when I look at you," and half mockingly the shameless girl bent her gaze on him—Belinda was undoubtedly progressing.

"Sooner or later your heart will go back to that other woman whom you so dearly loved. How do I know?" She nodded sagely. "I speak from experience. However angry and hurt you feel, sooner or later the love will come back. I have felt indignant with David. I thought he had deceived and trifled with me. But that is all over. I doubt him no longer. I am content to wait. And you—"

"I wait also," said Alphonse.

She sighed, and let her hand fall listlessly at her side.

"How rarely a man loves as we women understand it," she said slowly. "With us it is his happiness that makes ours; if he is hurt we suffer, and immediately desire forgiveness for a fault we oftentimes have not committed."

"With men it seems far otherwise. It is their own feelings not ours they study. If their pride is in arms, in arms it will stay until the woman who loves them pleads for pardon. Not an inch of the way will they go to meet her; they will not even say in what manner she has offended."

"Why do you not go and ask the woman you say you loved to give you an explanation? No, you shake your head. You are too proud—too mean. You will not run the chance of a rebuff, whereas the women—" She paused, and in a low voice murmured:

"She cares for you and your absence hurts her cruelly."

Then, with a slight inclination of her head, she rose and joined Farrington, who was, as usual, hovering near her.

Much discomposed at the turn her conversation with Alphonse had taken, I followed. Somehow or other the artist must be got away from *La Caprice*, away from Belinda's influence.

Chance helped me to accomplish this. Mrs. Dawtrey on the strength of a flirtation with Alphonse, commenced and ended one winter in Rome, laughingly claimed him as her property. Hervé, the hero of a hundred intrigues, fell into the jest. He became her most devoted slave, and fetched and carried in the most approved fashion.

Belinda, disgusted at his conduct—she never would understand the customs of Society—pointedly avoided him, and spent most of her time with Farringdon.

Baron Rolla, much to my surprise, had not renewed his attentions to Belinda. It was not that she had ceased to attract him, that was quite plain, but for some reason that for the moment baffled me. An interview I overheard gave me the necessary clue.

It was late one evening, after dinner. The actors in the little playhouse in the grounds were performing a French comedy, which was highly improper without being witty—sufficient reasons for my own and Belinda's absence.

I saw her off with Farringdon and set out for a stroll by myself, thinking to come across the Baron—Rolla was a good-natured man and in odd moments could be persuaded to give a Stock Exchange tip likely to be of substantial service.

I discovered him with Celia Dawtrey. They were sitting in one of the pavilions for which the grounds of *La Caprice* are famous. The place was shaded by thick trees, and as I lingered in the moonlight their voices literally forced themselves upon my ears.

"I can't do it, Celia," said the Baron in his deep voice. "I've lent you hundreds and thousands of francs already. You are insatiable, like a brigand, you want to pillage everybody."

Celia's pretty painted face turned old for a second in the moonlight.

"I must have the money, Victor," she said, her teeth chattering with agitation. "I—"

He stopped her with a gesture.

"Very well, you shall have it, but on one condition. You must leave here—and very shortly."

"Leave *La Caprice*! Leave you, Victor!" She clasped her hands about his arms, lowering her lids, so that the vindictive gleam in her light eyes should not be seen.

"Oh, you will console yourself for my absence. I do not wish you to be here—you—"

"I understand," she said with a mocking laugh. "You fear I shall interfere with your plans in regard to that girl. You are afraid I shall tell tales and spoil your chance. Why," she laughed mockingly in her shrill treble, waking the echoes of the night; "why she won't look at you. She thinks you are old, ugly and——" Celia grew hysterical with mirth—"fat!"

"All the same, you'll go," he said between his teeth, "if you want me to lend you the money."

"And what if I refuse the money and decide to stay?"

"You won't, Celia. When did you ever refuse anything? Come, my dear, be reasonable, and decide to start for the Austrian Tyrol within the week."

"So that is it," said Celia, with a little stamp. "I have wondered at the change in you, and—and——"

The Baron lost patience and stopped her roughly. It was evident to me that the little Dawtrey's reign with him was over. She was a clever little creature and deserved well of Society, because she never created scandal. Her intrigues were known and at the same time were not known. She lived three months of the year with her husband in their house in Chesham Place, and they were generally spoken of as a devoted couple!

Mr. Dawtrey was always stingy and like a bear, but he knew how to behave. He was mostly absorbed in foreign speculations which took him to out-of-the-way spots. He was large, ugly and solemn, but he did well in his place like the great Japanese bronze that sat cross-legged in the hall. Above everything else he never questioned his wife—so long as she

was not talked about outside her set, it was plainly his duty to keep silence.

The Baron evidently made the required loan, for Celia appeared at the card table some hours later with a substantial roll of notes. As usual, she played wildly and recklessly, plunging for all she was worth. Whatever she had originally intended to do with the money she borrowed from Rolla, her present intention was evident, she meant to risk it at play.

Note after note slipped from the roll. We were playing in Toffy's rooms, and the Yankee made it a rule that all debts should be settled at the time. She had quietly but firmly refused to allow a very great lady indeed to postpone payment, pointing out that cards were for profit as well as for pleasure!

Celia was playing against Rolla, who, with a bland smile, was winning back all the money he had lent her a few hours ago. When the money was exhausted she rushed from the room with a strange look on her face. Belinda followed her. Not knowing what the misguided girl was about to do I thought it better to overhear their conversation.

Belinda had drawn Celia into a small room some short distance down the corridor.

"I've had your note," she said, "but I don't understand it. What do you mean by saying I have driven you from this house?"

"It's true, quite true," flamed the other. "Rolla has told me to leave, to leave *La Caprice*, for fear I should prejudice you against him. He wants to make you his wife, to buy you as he buys his pictures, his statues, his houses. Your indifference merely increases his determination."

"He is prepared to play the saint to win you, and because I know that he is something very different he wishes me gone. And I"—she threw out her hands with an impassioned gesture—"I am poor," she said, "and I have had to borrow money from the Baron. I have had to beg him to lend me some this very night."

"Do you know why?" She came close to Belinda, gazing at her with a pathetic earnestness, that would have made her fortune at the Porte St. Martin—"it is because my boy, my dear boy, is in trouble. He is at Sandhurst, his father is strict, he has lost money, he——" Celia broke down in a torrent of tears.

"You poor thing," said Belinda, as quick to console her as she had been to champion Midge long ago, "I am so sorry for you. Of course you must help your boy, and as for Rolla—I shall tell him what I think of his conduct. I used to like him, but now——" She gave an expressive gesture.

"Yes, but look here," said Celia, "I've lost nearly all the money he lent me. I had hoped to double it at cards to-night, but luck was dead against me. I can't pay the Baron back. I shall have to go."

"I'll pay the Baron," said Belinda impressively. "At least I'll let you have the money to pay him."

"You dear," purred Celia. "You dear, sweet thing. I always declared you were too good for words."

Belinda shook herself free from Celia's ardent embrace, and somewhat gravely produced a small *porte monnaie*, from which she abstracted a packet of notes—her month's allowance of pocket money. Celia caught at them greedily.

"It's not nearly enough to pay Rolla," she said glibly, "but it will help to turn my luck to-night. If one can hold out long enough you know the luck always changes—always."

Clutching the money she turned back to the card-table. I linked my arm in Belinda's, and read her a lecture on her folly.

"You've embroiled yourself to no purpose," I said angrily. "Celia will make mischief all round. You're a very silly girl."



"She was in distress about her boy," said Belinda. "No one could help being sorry for her."

"Her boy!" I echoed, with a laugh, "why she doesn't see him from one year's end to another. The poor image hardly knows what his mother is like. Celia's much too occupied with herself to think of seeing her son."

Belinda looked grave but made no answer. She returned to Toffy's boudoir and, against her usual practice, seated herself at the card-table, with the intention of taking a hand.

Celia took the chair next to her. The notes lent by Belinda went the way of those furnished by the Baron. Luck was persistently against the little woman, as it was in favour of Sarah Givins, who simply raked in money all the time. There was a feeling of suppressed excitement in the air. Celia's face turned a ghastly pallor underneath the rouge, and her eyes looked hollow in the electric light. Alphonse, who had regarded Belinda's presence at the table with evident discomfort, leant forward and in a low tone urged me to send the girl to bed.

"She shouldn't be here," he said, "the atmosphere is too feverish. Look"—he glanced round the table, and the contrast between the girl with her pure, sweet face, and the women about her with their painted cheeks, their blackened eyebrows, and the air of rapacity which gleamed from their eyes, struck one sharply.

"Surely," said Alphonse, "we have played enough. See the day is already dawning." He rose, walked to the window, and flung up the sash. The rosy light of dawn quivered over land and sea. The leaves were shivering in the morning breeze.

From the alleys dusky with citron and lemon-trees came the scent of the roses; and the wash of the waves upon the shore made music. In the soft touch of the early morning light the women at the table looked strange and haggard, like creatures of another world.

I caught sight of my face in the glass, and for a moment I had a strange contraction at my heart. I felt old, horribly old; a fear of the future darkened my sight; my nerve, my will were all I had to help me from slipping from my place in society.

Once fall out of the ranks and you never regain your place in the gay procession. It sweeps by you, treading you under-foot, with a careless, high-pitched laugh from the women and a shrug from the men.

The thought quickened my resolve to earn, by whatever means, the £20,000 promised by Hardy North when I should have married Belinda.

Toffy's high voice roused me.

"I guess we won't play any after now," she said, "I'm getting sleepy."

The rest agreed—all except Celia.

"Nonsense," she cried, "it's absurd to end now. Come, I insist," and she eagerly gathered up the cards.

The Yankee took up the challenge and the pair commenced to play *écarté*, the others standing round to watch. The luck was still with Toffy, Celia had lost all but a few notes. At last, with whitened lips and a catching of the breath, she laid a card upon the table.

"My ace beats your king, and—"

"Stop." Toffy leant eagerly across the table. "You have a card concealed," she said. "Look!" And she motioned towards the other's flimsy handkerchief.

"Lift up that handkerchief, one of you," she cried. "I swear there's a card underneath."

It was a critical moment. The women stared resentfully at Toffy and malignantly at Celia. They resented the accusation even more than the crime. Such things are not altogether unknown in our set—but we contrive to hush them up. Toffy, of course, was an outsider.

Rolla, in response to the Yankee's words, stepped forward to lift the handkerchief, when, like a flash, Belinda interposed. "There is no card here," she said, raising the flimsy piece of lace—"no card at all."

Even as she spoke Toffy, with a mocking laugh, pointed to her frock! There in the folds of her bodice—Belinda's bodice—was the missing card!

(Another exciting instalment will appear next Tuesday.)

£5 A WEEK FOR LIFE!

In Addition to £1,000 in Cash,
Offered by THE BIG BUDGET.

£5 A WEEK FOR LIFE is so huge that it is almost impossible for one to realise at first thought what it really means. Therefore the following hints will probably enable you to grasp the full value of such a regular income:

£5 A WEEK FOR LIFE means, unless you are extravagant, absolute freedom from money troubles as long as you live.

£5 A WEEK FOR LIFE is an insurance against depression and mental worry.

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£5 A WEEK FOR LIFE will buy anything you can possibly want, from a piano to a motor-car.

In fact, there is no limit to the things you can do with **£5 A WEEK FOR LIFE**.

THE prize will be paid to the person (perhaps you) who correctly solves a number of pictures which appear in THE BIG BUDGET, under the conditions printed in that paper.

Each picture consists of certain objects, the names of which represent the name of a railway station in the United Kingdom. For example, the hull of a ship would mean "Hull." Every name will be found in Bradshaw's Railway Guide.

A further sum of **£1,000 in cash** will be distributed as consolation gifts amongst those who come next to the first winner in the following manner:—

FIRST CONSOLATION GIFT, £100.

2nd and 3rd Cash Gifts	...	...	...	£50 each.
4th to 7th	"	"	"	£25 "
8th to 57th	"	"	"	£10 "
58th to 97th	"	"	"	£5 "

So you see, even if you do not succeed in securing the first prize of **£5 a Week for Life (which will be paid under any circumstances)**, you have a good opportunity of securing one of the cash gifts.

A GRAMOPHONE FOR A REQUEST.

It is not everyone who can afford to buy a piano, or even a musical instrument of any sort, and to such persons a Gramophone—which is another name for a talking and singing machine—would be a much-prized gift.

Each Gramophone we are giving away is accompanied by two records, and is fitted with a Concert Sound-Box which greatly increases the volume of sound.

You can win a Gramophone by just asking for it.

A Gramophone will be given to each of the ten readers whose requests the Editor considers best. No request must contain more than twenty words.

Post-cards only must be used, and they should be addressed to the REQUEST EDITOR, Short Stories, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta St., W.C., to arrive not later than first post on Tuesday, Feb. 17.

The Editor's decision is final, and competitors must only enter on that understanding.



Telling of How a Man Showed His Courage.

WHEN Jack Stanley and Eva Coleman went spinning along the street behind his beautiful grey trotters, everybody envied him and the handsome girl who was soon to become his wife. How happy they looked, laughing and chatting gaily, as the trotters glided swiftly, almost noiselessly, by!

As they drove out of Grayson Place, where their new home was building, and turned again into the street, the inspiring strains of martial music fell upon their ears, and the next moment a company of soldiers swept round the corner, marching towards them with military precision.

Jack was compelled to give his entire attention to the spirited team, which seemed determined to reach the next street by taking a short cut through a garden, the gate of which was open, but his affianced looked with great admiration at the stalwart forms and sunbrowned faces of the soldiers. After they had passed she exclaimed:

"What a grand sight! How nice men look in uniforms! Oh, I love soldiers!"

"Yes, that was a fine-looking body of men. We have a splendid lot of fellows in our Army."

"Especially since the war, when so many men enlisted," said the girl. Then, without waiting for any reply, she asked abruptly, "Why didn't you volunteer, Jack?"

"Oh, I don't know, Eva," he said. "I did not think it altogether necessary; there were enough fellows without me."

"If I were a man," was the rejoinder, "and my country needed me, I would certainly respond, for I think it the duty of every able-bodied young man to fight for his flag. To me it shows a lack of proper spirit when he does not."

The blood surged hotly into Jack's face at Eva's remark, for he thought of the hard battle he had fought when he unwillingly remained still while his friends and schoolfellows were enlisting. When at last they went away without him, it was one of the bitterest trials of his young life.

But how could he do otherwise? His father, who seemed failing rapidly, needed his help—needed the strong arm of his only son to lean upon. And when his gentle mother added her tears and intreaties to Jack not to leave them, he gave up all thoughts of enlisting, and plunged more deeply into the management of his father's business. They were left alone some months later, and Jack was thankful that he had remained at home to support and comfort his sorrowing mother.

And now Eva, his promised wife, had intimated that it was lack of courage which had kept him back—that he was a coward! The words were like a knife thrust in his heart.

The drive ended; the "good-night" at the gate was spoken abruptly, leaving them both very unhappy over their first quarrel.

Just at this time the large bodies of unemployed were causing a great deal of uneasiness. Their disturbances were not felt very keenly in the West End, the riots and hostile demonstrations being confined chiefly to other parts of the city.

So it was without thought of danger that Eva Coleman boarded a bus to go on an errand, little realising that she was going directly into one of the districts where many of the unemployed lived, and with whom most of the residents sympathised.

When she alighted from the bus she was almost immediately surrounded by a crowd of hooting men and boys, who shouted vile epithets at her, and followed up their words with a volley of sticks and mud.

The thoroughly frightened girl started to run away, the mob following closely. In her terror she sought refuge in the nearest open door, which proved to be that of a public-house but from which she was roughly pushed back into the street again by the cowardly proprietor of the place.

At that moment a man knocked off Eva's hat. For a brief moment the mob turned its attention to the stylish piece of head-gear, placing it upon a stick and raising it above their heads, where it was immediately pelted with mud.

At that instant a woman, who had seen from her window the beginning of the disgraceful affair, ran into the street, pleading with the mob to desist and not attack the girl, but in vain, and both she and Eva were struck by flying missiles as the crowd closed in round them, hooting and jeering and yelling:

"Down with the aristocrats!"

Then came a lull in the attack, followed by a sudden confusion in the mob of howling wretches, as a man rushed frantically among them, scattering them in every direction by furious blows about him, and cutting a wide path as he went to the rescue of the helpless women.

Eva's heart beat wildly with gratitude to this brave stranger, who had with such magnificent courage rushed single-handed into the fray, with only a stick, picked up as he ran, for a weapon.

As she looked, a prayer of thankfulness upon her lips, she saw the man reel from the effects of a blow upon the head, and sink to the ground. For an instant she had seen his face, white and ghastly, and a cry of horror escaped her; it was Jack, her Jack, whom she had but the evening before called a coward.

Some one in the crowd yelled, "The cops are coming!" And the ruffians fled into side streets and alleys, disappearing quickly, as a posse of policemen, who had responded to a riot call, came round the corner.

In a moment the wounded man was lifted tenderly into an ambulance and hurried away to the hospital. Eva, dishevelled and tearful, was filled with dreadful misgivings concerning his welfare, and wanted to follow him and ascertain for herself his condition; but the brave woman who had come to her rescue opposed this, and succeeded in prevailing upon the anxious girl to wait until a conveyance could be had.

When the carriage came, Eva gave instructions to the driver to call at the hospital and wait until the result of Jack's injuries could be learnt.

She experienced a feeling of intense relief and happiness when told that he had received but a slight wound.

"He was only knocked senseless," explained the hospital surgeon, noting the look of anxiety on the girl's face. Then he added reassuringly, "He's come round all right, and as soon as they get the cut on his head fixed up, he'll be able to go home."

Eva did not wait for Jack, nor did she leave her name, so when he was told of her call he could only surmise that it was she, but was not a little puzzled to know how she could have heard of the affair so soon.

That evening a note was handed to the young man, who sprang to his feet with a fierce look in his eyes, and an exclamation that would have shocked Eva, if she could have heard it, when he learnt that his sweetheart, the girl who was soon to be his wife, was the victim of that cowardly assault, and to whose rescue he had hastened.

He strode up and down the room with clenched fist, vowing dire vengeance upon the mob and particularly against the brute whom he had seen push the girl back into the very face of that awful crowd.

Then, regardless of the strips of court plaster upon his forehead, he seized his hat and rushed away to Eva's home.

It was a very tearful and penitent face that was upturned to receive his kiss, and a sobbing girl clung to him, brokenly imploring his forgiveness for her cruel words of the evening before.

"You are right," she said after a while. "It requires courage to be a soldier, but sometimes it requires higher courage not to be one. If I—"

He stopped her with a kiss. Laura Ellen Beale.



The Wrong Mr. Miller.

The Story of a Correspondence and a Love Affair.

"My dear Mr. Miller,—
I promised you once—it
was quite a while ago, to be
sure, but then it was a
promise—that some day I
would write a letter to you.
To-day seems a good time

to do it. I am in very low spirits, and decidedly irritated
against life in general. The thermometer is below freezing-
point, and the street is filled with racing clouds of dust.

"Here, in Ikley, when the wind blows, everybody quarrels
with life, and I am no exception. And as you used to be a
very bracing person to quarrel with, the idea of writing to
you seems a happy one, even after four years.

"I take for granted that you are still in London. London
is so unlike Ikley! People live in London—they spend
whole existences there, and are buried there when they die.
Here, in Ikley, people visit; they don't live.

"In four years everything changes; one's whole visiting list
fades away like a dream, and changes like a kaleidoscope, into
an entirely new set of acquaintances and intimates.

"I have had thirteen intimate friends in four years, and
all lost to me now forever!—is not that a striking reminder
of the transitoriness of life? One is in Mexico, one in Rome,
one in a convent at Paris, two in New York, one in India, one
in Scotland, one in Egypt, two in Ireland, and three have died.

"Everybody who does not die here goes away, before long,
to the ends of the earth, as you see. In comparison, London
must be a place of solid and enduring social relations. I am
in the mood to-day to envy the rooted security of a Londoner!

"Do you remember how you used to laugh at my father's
investments in mining stocks four years ago? Well, they have
turned out a stroke of financial genius, after all, and made
our fortune.

"It is rather exciting being rich—and rather dull, too.
And now, having kept my promise most generously, to the
extent of six pages, it is time to stop. I hear you echo the
sentiment—but I am, notwithstanding,—Sincerely yours,

ISABEL BROWN."

The young man smiled as he laid down the letter on his
desk, amid the business papers that crowded it.

"She was a clever girl!" he said to himself, "but I never
thought she would write that sort of letter. Too impersonal,
somehow. She writes a very pretty hand, though."

Perhaps it was the four years perspective into which the
attractive acquaintance of a summer at Llandudno had
receded, that gave this effect to his mind.

At any rate, he remembered her as she was, that last after-
noon, when they stood on the cliffs looking over at the breakers
below. They had not been impersonal at all that day, but
very much the opposite—and he had realised since, more than
at the time, how very near he had been to being in love with
her, and how much one week more of intimacy might have
meant to them both.

How he had hoped that she would write—though she had
only smiled at his request, and promised that some day she
might. He had not forgotten, and he had really never liked
any other woman so well. And now she had written. Why?

Was it just one of those little inconsistent impulses of hers
that he had found so charming four years ago—or did it
mean more? The only answer to that question, manifestly,
was to answer the letter at once.

And though the business correspondence was attended to
promptly that day, yet a summer afternoon, and a speaking
pair of dark eyes, were more in the writer's thoughts than
was at all necessary.

It was surprising after the answer was sent, and the corre-
spondence begun thus tentatively, how soon it grew and
throve, and increased.

Miss Mabel Brown's postman, hastening along the Ikley
roads, brought at shorter and shorter intervals, longer and
longer letters from London; while Mr. George W. Miller's
desk in the large city offices of that wealthy firm of which
he was junior partner, was never long without a specimen
of Miss Brown's handwriting.

It was a revelation at both ends of the line, how much one
could put on paper for a sympathetic reader, and how intimate
a knowledge one gains of a special correspondent from week
to week.

Mr. Miller soon learnt that he had never really known a girl
before—that is, never understood one—and that Miss Brown's
opinions, Miss Brown's tastes, Miss Brown's individuality
exactly and continually satisfied and delighted him; while
Miss Brown felt that she could never have believed that
George Miller could develop such attractive traits and such
a thoroughly congenial set of ideas and aspirations.

They were a revelation to each other—first a monthly
then a weekly, then almost a daily revelation. It matters
not how often such a discovery is made, in each new case it is
equally astonishing and suggestive, and leads inevitably to
the further discovery that letter-writing has its limits, and
needs the supplement of personal intercourse to perfect its
delights.

The end of it was that, six months after Miss Brown's
letter to him, Mr. George Miller himself arrived at Ikley, one
September morning, with three of Isabel's last letters in his
inside coat-pocket, and a pre-occupation so great that he paid
no attention to anything that happened on the journey.

Isabel, on her side, was not in the least surprised when he
was announced at her home, for his last letter—well, she was
quite ready to welcome him, and prepared to descend the
stairs without any symptoms of astonishment, except that
her heart was beating with most inconvenient quickness, and
her cheeks were as red as the heart of a June rose.

This being the state of the young people's feelings it is
somewhat strange to be obliged to chronicle that when Miss
Brown entered the drawing-room, and Mr. Miller rose eagerly
at her approach, they should have stood looking at each
other as if turned to stone.

For fully two minutes not a word was interchanged;
then the lady, with a gasp, sank down into the nearest chair
and covered her face with her hands, while the young man,
bending over her, murmured awkwardly:

"I beg your pardon, Miss Brown—is it Miss Brown?"

"Yes, it is!" returned the girl, sitting up defiantly, her
blue eyes ablaze and her slender figure full of angry grace.

"What right have you, sir, to ask me such a question, when you are masquerading under somebody else's name yourself?"

"I was christened George Wharton Miller," returned the young man, with equal bitterness, "and my parents are, therefore, responsible for the 'masquerading.'"

"Wharton!" cried Miss Brown. "I never heard of you before! I never wrote to George Wharton Miller—the right name is George William Miller!"

Mr. Miller sat gravely down in the nearest chair—she was certainly distractingly pretty—and regarded her with a return to his Londonian calmness of manner.

"Your letter was addressed to George W. Miller," he said slowly, "and the postman made a natural mistake, since our firm is the most important of the name. Probably there are ten George William Millers in London. But that doesn't explain how Miss Isabel Brown, of Ilkley——"

"Oh—why, of course—I never thought!" cried the girl, embarrassment succeeding anger—"that is, of course, I thought your answer was to me; but my cousin, Isabel Brown, used to live in Ilkley, until two years ago, when she—she married, you know, and went to live in Liverpool. I never thought, of course, oh, isn't it dreadful! And where is George William Miller—he ought to be in London, somewhere!"

"I dare say he is, at this moment," replied George Wharton Miller, with increasing mastery of the situation. "And I don't see anything to do but to leave him there, and leave Miss Isabella Brown, that was, in Liverpool, and think no more about them. Our correspondence has been with each other, after all, you see, and not with them."

"Oh!" said Isabel. "But—but I've known George Miller really, for years—it was easy to write to him."

"I don't believe," said the other George Miller, judicially, "that you know him half so well as you know me."

Miss Brown blushed. She did not look angry at all, and was, decidedly, prettier than ever—much prettier than Isabella had ever been. Had he really known Isabella at all? No, certainly not; Isabella had never corresponded with him.

"I am sure," he went on, rather stumbling this time, "that I know you better than I do any other woman in the world. Haven't I told you—well, just everything, in my letters? And you really cared, you know—you said so. It's the personality, the—the soul, that goes into a letter. We know each other, and I—why, I can't let you go, just because I'm not acquainted with you! Don't you see—don't you feel——"

"Yes," said Isabel faintly. "But—but—you're such a perfect stranger, you know!"

And then suddenly a mirthful twinkle sparkled in her blue eyes, a distracting dimple hovered in her cheek, and she began to laugh—an irresistible, contagious, musical laugh—which swept the young man along in its merry current till he finally joined in heartily.

They laughed until the tears came to their eyes; they could not stop; the inexhaustible perfection of the joke opened before them in new waves of merriment.

It was a laugh of deep and sympathetic comradeship; and when they ceased, exhausted with mirth, and looked into each other's eyes, it was as if they had known each other for years.

"But wasn't it queer," said Isabel, an hour or so later, "that Isabella should have met you at Llandudno, and I should have been there later that season, with your namesake in the party?"

"Do you know, I always wondered why you referred with such earnestness to Llandudno, because—I actually snubbed him, most unkindly, that summer. My letter was really a kind of tardy apology to him—and he never got it."

"Do you wish he had?" said George.

"When I am better acquainted with you, perhaps I can tell," said Isabel, with a demure smile.

And George knew, then and there, that the letter had come to the right address—for him.

Priscilla Leonard.



In three weeks' time we shall publish the first instalment of MR. NORMAN SILVER'S NEW STORY. In this number also will appear particulars of a brand new competition which will create an enormous amount of interest, and for which everyone will be eligible. And, finally, the third attraction will be the new series of article stories dealing with "THE CONFESSIONS OF A SELF-MADE GIRL."

Altogether, the number dated March 7 will be a splendid one in every respect, and there will unquestionably be a very large rush for it. Therefore, it will be well for you to mention to your newsagent the fact that you want a copy reserved for you.

A CORRESPONDENT signing himself "GINGER" asks why the heroines in *Short Stories* never seem to have red hair. Red hair, he maintains, is the most beautiful hair, and people with red hair are always strong and good.

It has certainly never struck me before that the chief characters in our stories have been devoid of hair of so charming a hue. However, I will see what can be done in the matter, and no doubt you will shortly find a story in which the hair of one of the chief characters is of the colour you require.

I HAVE received a very interesting letter from a Manchester correspondent, who, after saying quite a number of kind things about the paper, goes on to say:

"Now, dear Editor, can you tell me why *SHORT STORIES* is like a bicycle? No? Give it up? Because in the short complete stories one may discern the frame of the machine from which its whole build and material may be judged. Then the serials can be likened to the wheels, ever revolving and whirling on into new and stirring scenes. The Editor's Chat forms the handle bars, by means of which the machine may be governed and rightly directed. The storyettes, jokes, anecdotes, etc., are the different bearings which fit in and strengthen the whole structure, and, well oiled by the splendid prize competitions offered weekly, make it run very easily and without any hitch."

A MIDDLE-CLASS MOTHER writes: "In this week's instalment of 'How I Chaperoned Belinda' I see that Lady Peggy Carstairs has made a most envenomed attack on middle-class wives. I am a middle-class wife, and I do not consider Lady Peggy an authority upon the matter—how could she be? It is very easy for a woman in her ladyship's position to talk and write upon a matter she cannot possibly know anything about, unless she has at some time been a district visitor, and I should hardly imagine that was in her line. Middle-class wives, I would like Lady Peggy to know, are very much happier and their husbands are much more content than the wives and husbands in Lady Peggy's own sphere, where divorces and scandals are commonplace occurrences. Perhaps middle-class wives are not so well groomed as their aristocratic sisters, but then they have to work. All the thousand and one petty cares of a struggling household are theirs, and out of the riches of their love they have to eke out the wretched pittance that their husbands win. They must stint themselves that he can keep up appearances. They must go on scanty commons that their children appear well dressed. Small wonder that they are not always smiling, but at least their smiles are genuine, and are not bought or sold."—I shall be interested to receive opinions on this subject from other readers.

Your Editor.



"It is all a mistake!" declared Harcourt Dorrington half audibly. "Maggie engaged to John Allinson! Yes, there it is, plain enough!"

He stared at the announcement in the newspaper, unwilling to believe what he saw there. He was in love with Maggie Rosslyn himself; she knew that he was in love with her, for he had told her so when he last saw her, a month previously, but she had stopped his declaration with a frightened gesture, and he had desisted because he thought that he had been too abrupt; and now he discovered that the prize had been taken from him by John Allinson.

What did her frightened gesture signify? Was it that she was prepared to accept Allinson and Harcourt's outburst had come as a surprise to her? Perhaps she had wished to spare him, but had not had the courage to tell him that she loved someone else?

"No!" said Harcourt Dorrington decisively. "She has been forced into an engagement with him. I cannot believe that a bright nature like hers would ally itself willingly with a quiet, scientifically-minded man such as Allinson. What inducement can there be? He has a good position with the mining company as scientific adviser, but my position as manager is equally good. If he had been a man from outside the county, one who could take her to live amid gaiety, there might be some reason for the choice, but she must live near here. Moreover, I do not believe that she wishes to leave the dear old Cornish spot where she has lived all her girlhood."

As Dorrington speculated on the reasons which had led Maggie to give her hand to Allinson, the feeling of disappointment grew stronger and stronger till it engendered a sentiment of jealousy and revenge.

"Why should he have her?" he muttered angrily. "I'll see her and find out the truth; if she has been cajoled and forced into it, I'll upset it." Then another thought crossed his mind. Suppose that it was really her own choice? A nervous tremor passed through his whole frame; he shut out that thought, as an ostrich tries to avoid seeing the true state of things by burying its head in the sand.

He was aroused from the preoccupation which absorbed him by hearing a loud knock at his office door. In answer to his "Come in!" the door opened to admit John Allinson.

"I thought you were not here, Dorrington," observed the visitor with a smile. "I knocked three times! Busy, I suppose!"

He was a man of strong build, handsome face and quick, kindly eyes. He resembled an athlete more than a student, yet there was a modesty about him that denoted the retiring habits of a man of books and scientific experiments rather

than the man of sport. At times, John Allinson was positively shy.

"I was thinking, Allinson," replied Dorrington, just a little awkwardly. He tossed the newspaper aside, hoping that his visitor had not noticed the page at which it had lain open. "What's the trouble? 'Anything I can do for you?'"

"Yes. It seems that Miss Rosslyn wishes to explore the old Pengrave Mine. I have—she has learnt something of the geological formation of the mine, and she would like to go through one or two of the passages. It's very interesting, you know. Of course, these tin mines are very ancient; the Pengrave Mine was probably worked in the time of—"

"Yes, yes, I know!" interrupted Dorrington. Allinson's presence and the mention of Maggie had irritated him. "I am not sure that we can give her the desired opportunity. It is not unattended with danger, Allinson, and the Directors are rather strict about it."

"I know, but I do not think there is the slightest danger in the part we propose to explore," Dorrington noticed the pronoun *we*. "The mine must be entered from the Treherne Mine, through the long, narrow passage that connects them; it would not be possible to descend through the sloping boring half a mile away; the earth is too loose there now."

"That opening is probably blocked by earth, which would prevent the improvised door at the end from being opened," remarked Dorrington. "You can go through the Mole Run, from Treherne to Pengrave, if that isn't blocked. When do you propose to go?"

"This afternoon," replied Allinson. "We had better have somebody to accompany us, and I thought you could tell a man off for that duty."

Several thoughts chased themselves through the mind of Harcourt Dorrington, and when he replied his voice was not quite steady.

"I think I had better come with you myself, Allinson. There may be a little scrambling over heaps, and Miss Rosslyn would, I suppose, prefer to have a gentleman to assist her, with you, if assistance is required. Besides, I may take the liberty of saying that there are points which I may be able to explain also."

"Precisely!" admitted Allinson slowly. The suggestion was not pleasant, but he could say nothing. "Then it is fixed for this afternoon. At what time?"

They soon settled that and other details, and Dorrington was left alone to meditate on the chances of the afternoon visit to the old mine.

Dorrington, returning from a tour of inspection, reached the mouth of the narrow passage, termed the Mole Run, at

the appointed time to a minute, and found Maggie Rosslyn and her betrothed husband waiting for him.

"You are very bold, Miss Rosslyn, to venture upon this journey," said Dorrington, with a pleasant smile. "I hope you have come prepared for getting a fair amount of earth and dirt on your clothes!"

"Oh!" laughed Maggie. "I have nothing on that will spoil!"

She was immensely relieved to find him so frank and friendly. She had been shy at meeting him, remembering what had passed, and she was thankful that he had accepted the situation.

Dorrington's heart had leapt on beholding once more the girl he loved so passionately. The clear-cut features, the graceful figure, the mass of beautiful hair arranged so elegantly formed a picture which burnt itself upon his brain. As he passed by her to take the lead, he brushed lightly against her dress, and the contact almost unnerved him. He had to make a great effort to conquer the almost irresistible impulse to take her in his arms and kiss her.

He entered the Mole Run, followed by Maggie Rosslyn, with John Allinson bringing up the rear. Although he had spoken of earth and dirt to Maggie, and of scrambling to Allinson, he did not expect any difficulty or that the path would be encumbered to such an extent as to make their clothes unclean. The last subsidence had taken place more than a quarter of a century since, and the paths had been cleared by successive exploring parties.

The Mole Run, at the point of connection with the Pen-grave Mine, was very small—so narrow, in fact, that the members of the little party had to stoop very low in order to get through.

As he helped Maggie out into the wider cutting, Dorrington again felt the impulse and again conquered it; but he was not so strong this time, and he could not prevent himself from giving a slight pressure of his hands upon hers, a pressure that lasted longer than it need have done.

Maggie shivered and turned to Allinson, who had just emerged from the Mole Run.

"I really do not think this is going to be so enjoyable as I imagined!" she began. She was going to add that she would rather go back, but the look of disappointment in Allinson's face, seen by the light of the lanterns held by all three, caused her to alter her tone. "I suppose I shall get accustomed to the darkness and the uncanniness of the place in a minute or two!" she concluded.

"Of course, you will!" agreed Allinson, with a look of loving anxiety. "Now, you must begin to take note, Maggie. Here, for instance, is a specimen of a geological stratum which presents peculiar features."

Science took possession of him, and he explained this and that, never doubting that his companions were listening. Dorrington contrived to hinder Maggie's progress, so that Allinson got in front and gradually left them some yards behind.

Under pretence of assisting her, Dorrington held her hand.

"Round here is a short cutting, rather circuitous, which I remember," called out Allinson. "It's worth seeing! Come along!"

"Suppose you go first and see if all is clear!" cried Dorrington before Maggie could answer, and detaining her as she was about to hurry forward. "It might not be safe!"

Allinson disappeared in the cutting, and Harcourt held his lantern aloft in order that the light might fall full on her face.

"Who forces you to marry him?" he demanded abruptly. "You do not love him; you cannot! He does not love you as I do!"

"Mr. Dorrington!" cried Maggie, drawing herself up to her full height. "Your conduct is——"

"My conduct is that of a man who is consumed by the flame of a great love!" he said in a low voice, terrible

in its intensity. "I loved you—I love you! You knew it, you know it now! Why did you spurn my love and give yourself to him? You owe me an explanation, and I demand it!"

"You have no right to demand it!" declared Maggie boldly, although she experienced a sensation of fear. "I have nothing to say, and I hope that you will not forget that you are a gentleman. Do not importune me further! Here is Mr. Allinson!"

John Allinson had re-appeared at that moment; Maggie went towards him and Dorrington drew his breath hard. It might end in a quarrel between the two men and——

The demon of jealousy and revenge was warping Harcourt Dorrington's nature, and the probable result of such a quarrel filled him for the time with exultation. Would Maggie tell her lover what had passed?

"I think we might go along this cutting, dear," said Allinson as Maggie approached him. "It runs close to the river at one point, and there is a part of it which is well worth examination from a scientific point of view. At one time there was gold about here. I should say."

"If you think so, we will go," responded Maggie with feigned interest. "Let me keep close to you, that you may explain."

Dorrington breathed more freely. After all, it was well not to quarrel down there.

They walked along the cutting sometimes stooping to avoid



"Who forces you to marry him?" Harcourt Dorrington asked, holding his lantern aloft.

knocking their heads, and at others stepping over heaps of fallen earth. Dorrington, tripping against a mound which he had been too deep in meditation to observe, fell against the wall; he did not hurt himself, but he noticed that there was a good deal of moisture on the surface.

"Is this safe, Allinson?" he asked almost mechanically. "Looks to me as if the river was doing its work here."

"Stay here, while I go forward!" said Allinson quickly. "I mustn't take you into danger, Maggie."

Before Maggie could object, he was hastening onward. He had proceeded only a few yards when there was a strange sound—a sound which they could compare to nothing else—and the earth tumbled about them.

"The river has broken a part of the wall," cried Dorrington, dismayed for the time by the disaster. "Heavens! The water will pour in and drown us!"

Maggie's face blanched, but she made no cry. It was an awful moment, as they felt the damp earth tumbling near and against them, felt the water as it oozed in and wondered how soon it would be before they were buried by a great fall of soil from above. Maggie's thoughts flew to Allinson; had he been overwhelmed?

They waited for the death that seemed to be threatening them, and the suspense of those terrible seconds was almost intolerable.

Then they found that the falling and crumbling had stopped, although the water was still flowing in and steadily rising.

"We are entombed," declared Dorrington. In the face of danger, and after the first shock, he was calm and collected. "The soil has fallen and has blocked the cutting on each side of us. It is lucky, so far, that it has not crushed us."

"Can we get out? I wonder if Mr. Allinson has—?" Maggie could not trust herself to say more.

"He may be entombed as we are. I do not think he has been overwhelmed by the falling earth," replied Dorrington, speaking quite candidly. "I think that the weak spot was here, and in going forward he got beyond it. He is more likely to get out than we are."

"You think, then, that we shall die here?" Maggie asked the question steadily, crushing down all the agony which the vision of such a death caused her.

Dorrington examined the prison in which they had been entombed; he looked above, at the sides, and lastly at the water, that was slowly rising—it was over their ankles—and replied:

"I fear so. We are caught in a trap!"

He looked again, and saw a block of earth on which she could stand, thus keeping out of the water for a time.

"Let me lift you to this block of earth, Maggie. It will keep you dry for a while; it is two feet high. That's it!"

He had lifted her tenderly to the new position. Holding up his lantern so that he could see her face, he gazed at her with eyes that were filled with intense longing.

"I called you 'Maggie.' You are mine!" he cried. "We shall die here together. Why should you not belong to me? Tell me that you love me?"

He seized her hand with his right hand, while he held the lantern with the left. He drew nearer to her; his breath came hot and fast as he raised himself and tried to make her bend, that he might kiss her.

"You are mine! Kiss me!" he cried hoarsely. "We die together; the past is nothing. Let us live for each other during the last few minutes!"

Maggie tried to release herself, affrighted at his vehemence. He was mad—mad with the longing to possess her.

"Mr. Dorrington, I love one man, and I love him with all my soul! I may never see him again, but I shall love him till I die!"

The words were uttered with simple dignity, and they extracted a cry of mingled rage and anguish from Dorrington.

"You must love me! You shall!" he cried fiercely.

"I will ask you again in a few minutes; when we are nearer death, you will come to me."

The water was rising somewhat more rapidly. He clambered up the sloping side of the cutting and secured a rough seat. The water rose to the height of the mound on which Maggie stood, and rose over her feet. She glanced about in vain for a way of escape, but she could see none. The cutting had altered in shape; one of the walls was sloping, and seemed more lofty than before. That was due to the sliding of the earth, no doubt, but it offered no escape. The services of a party of men with spades and pickaxes would be required, and it was unlikely that rescue would come before the water rose.

"Will you give yourself up to me?" asked Dorrington again.

The water was up to her waist. He was hanging on to a precarious position, but he was scraping away the soil in order to make a seat for both.

"Never!" she said decisively.

"Are you there, Maggie?" said a voice faintly.

It was that of Allinson, and Maggie uttered a cry of joy.



Suddenly Allinson's head appeared through a hole in the roof.

Where was he? She soon discovered that he was making his way through to them, scraping, tearing away the earth near the roof; it was loose just there, and the head and breast of Allinson soon showed through.

"Thank Heaven! You are both safe!" he gasped. "You must try to climb to this hole and crawl through; we can all get out through a small opening which the subsidence has produced. It is awfully risky, but we can try it."

Dorrington was between the girl and her lover; he looked from one to the other.

"Allinson," he said solemnly, "you have stolen my love from me. I will give her up to no man! She must choose between being my bride or the bride of death! Let her choose. If she and you agree that she shall marry me, she goes from here and lives. If she and you refuse, she and I remain here till death overtakes us. It is useless for you to attempt to reach her," he added, as Allinson made a movement with that object. "I can prevent that easily."

Allinson recognised the truth of this assertion and groaned. Maggie shot an appealing glance at John Allinson, but it was lost in the gloom; then she remembered that she would only be torturing him by any appeal for help and she refrained.

"Maggie," said Harcourt Dorington passionately, "you know that I love you as madly as any man can love. I cannot live without you! I would sooner have you die with me than see you the wife of another man. You must choose between life with me and death with me; which shall it be?"

There was an awe-inspiring pause, followed by one word, spoken deliberately.

"Death!"

Dorrington was near enough to see the marble pallor and rigidity of the girl's face. There was a determination about it which struck him like a sudden chill. He turned to Allinson.

"Do you wish her to die? Then tell her to live!"

There was a great inward struggle in the next half minute, but Allinson did not have the opportunity of telling the result of that struggle. Maggie spoke.

"If I cannot live with my betrothed husband by my side, I will die. It is useless to speak, John!"

Yet it was so hard to die! Dorington, had he not been so tormented by his own emotions, might have observed a relaxation of those set features; but he noticed nothing. He spoke pleasantly, to shake her determination.

"Maggie, would it be so hard to live with me by your side? I would watch over you, cherish you, try to realise your every wish. I would be your slave; my whole life would be devoted to making you happy. Think, try to imagine how I would strive for your happiness! Is it so very hard to love one who loves you so much?"

Maggie was touched by this appeal, although it could not alter her decision. Allinson, a prey to the greatest mental anguish, waited for her reply.

"It cannot be as you wish," she said gently. "I have made my choice. I am sorry, so sorry, that your own wishes cannot be realised, but is it fair to punish me for what I cannot help? You cannot help loving me and you consider that you are free to do so. I cannot help loving my betrothed husband better than anyone else, and surely I may claim freedom also? If you really love me as you say," she added, clasping her hands, her voice trembling with the intensity of her feelings, "then you will save me from this cruel death and let me live to be as happy as you desire me to be. I remind you of your latest words. Give me the chance of being happy!"

The water was rising and enveloping her; it reached to her breast. Harcourt Dorington stared at her, but his thoughts were far away. Her words had awakened something within him. He wished her to be happy, and she could not be happy with him—alas! Yet, why should he deprive her of the joy of living, and loving? He passed his hand across his brow, like one awakening from a disagreeable dream.

"Quick!" he cried in an altered tone. "Give me your hand. Try to climb here. Hurrah! Steady! That's it!"

Maggie felt his hands grasping hers, and heard the lantern drop into the water. It was dark, but she understood. Dorington's hands drew her up the sloping side, slipping and nearly falling, but she gained a kind of ledge. He helped her to move along in a sitting position, and after five minutes' dangerous work she knew that Allinson had grasped her and was aiding her to scramble through the hole to comparative safety.

"Safe, my darling!" whispered Allinson, kissing her rapturously.

"Now, Dorington, I can help you through!" he cried to the manager.

"I stay here!" replied Dorington calmly.

"No, no!" cried Allinson and Maggie Rosslyn in a breath. And the girl added: "You must come, to share our happiness, for your own sake and ours!"

Dorrington listened to the appeal, strangely moved. If he died, it would be a sad remembrance for them, and he must not cloud their lives. But could they forgive him? He asked them this question.

"We ask you to come with us and live to be useful to us and to all your fellow men," said Maggie simply, reverently.

He climbed along and through the hole to their side. Silently they made for the opening and widened it with their hands until they could force their way to liberty.

Allinson and Maggie were married two months later, but Dorington could not wait for that. He went off suddenly about a fortnight previously, and he is now in West Australia.

George Day.

HE: "Do you believe in woman taking man's place?"
SHE: "Yes; in a crowded railway carriage."

EFFIE: "Jack, papa said we must not see each other any more."
JACK: "Indeed! Then I will turn the gas out."

GEORGE: "Do you embrace Miss Sweetthing when you call on her?"
TOM: "Not now. Her father has established a press censorship."

HUSBAND: "For whom are you knitting those socks?"
WIFE: "For a benevolent society."
HUSBAND: "Do you know, you might send them my address. Perhaps they would send me a pair."

"MR. JONES, you said you were connected with the fine arts. Do you mean by that that you are a sculptor?"
"No, sir, I don't sculp myself, but I furnish the stone to the man that does."

THE dear girl had been baiting him again. "Do you believe in love at first sight?" she asked. "Of course," answered the bachelor. "Do you suppose, if a man had the gift of second sight, he would fall in love?"

FAMILY FRIEND: "I congratulate you, my dear sir, on the marriage of your daughter. I see you are gradually getting all the girls off your hands." Old Goldbranch: "Off my hands—yes; but the worst of it is I have to keep all their husbands on their feet."

"I PRESUME," said the talkative man to his meek-looking neighbour in the train, "from your manner and conversation, that you have family ties." "Yes," replied the other, "I suppose you might as well call 'em that. I buy 'em for myself, but my wife and the girls wear 'em whenever they feel like it."

CUSTOMER: "I thought I told you to paint me sitting on the verandah of my house. You've painted the verandah all right, but there's nobody on it." Artist: "Of course not. The painting represents an afternoon view. The sun would then be on the front of the house, and of course you wouldn't be sitting in the sun. The picture is true to art and to nature. You are supposed to be sitting in the back garden."



An Unsuitable Part:

Or, Bringing Him to the Point.

"My dear Daisy," expostulated her married sister, seating herself with considerable emphasis in a chair opposite Daisy, "you must bring him to the point. At present, it seems to me, he is playing with you!"

"Oh, no!" declared Daisy Braidwood energetically—that is, energetically for her, for she was a gentle, unassuming creature by disposition and almost the very opposite of her sister. "I can't think that!"

"It looks very much like it!" asserted the elder daughter of Mr. Braidwood. "He visits here and has created the impression that he has 'intentions,' as our respected aunt Mary would say, and everybody thinks that an engagement is about to be announced every day, and yet——"

"Don't you think you have put in enough 'ands'?" asked Daisy, laughing in order to hide her vexation. "People always know more about your business than you do yourself, so they expect announcements which should not be expected—or which they have no right to think about!"

Mrs. Maud Halifax shrugged her shoulders impatiently.

"Either the man wants you or he doesn't!" she said decisively. "And if I were in your place I would soon find out and make him declare himself or go away!"

"By flirting with someone else?" inquired Daisy with pretended innocence, having a lively recollection of her sister's methods before marriage.

Maud laughed at the arch manner in which Daisy asked the question.

"That character would not suit you, my dear," she cried. "You are too quiet for flirting, and, moreover, that kind of plan is a wee bit threadbare. No, I can suggest a better idea and I advise you to adopt it, unless you wish me to set John to work by telling your backward swain, confidentially, something or other that will quicken his wooing!"

"If you do that!" began Daisy, springing up with fear. "I should die of shame!"

Maud laughed heartily as she crossed to the couch and took a seat beside her sister. She unfolded her idea in a low tone; it did not commend itself at first to Daisy, who shrank from doing anything that might by any manner of means be regarded as "forward."

"There's nothing in it, and many people would say it was no plan at all; but that's just why I propose it. It is so easy. A real plot wouldn't suit you and it isn't required, unless I misjudge the man. He is in love with you, and you have to make him say so."

When Maud was gone, Daisy retired to her own room to reflect.

"I love him, love him dearly!" she murmured. She felt the colour mounting to her cheeks and she involuntarily cast a glance at the mirror, where she saw a vision of loveliness which ought to have extracted a declaration of love from most

men who appreciate the type of beauty which consists of a comely figure below the medium height—"plump" it would be colloquially termed, with a face that attracted you in spite of yourself, dark hair and equally dark eyes, with swiftly changing expression, and a healthy glow on the cheeks.

"Does he love me?" Daisy asked herself next, and the face became more thoughtful. "I really do not know; sometimes I think he does, whilst at others I fancy that he only finds in me an agreeable person with whom to chat. Perhaps Maud is right when she says that he is one of those rather absent-minded men who, although deeply in love, think that the object of their affections understands the fact as a matter of course, and that it is not necessary to show it in any special way. They forget that women like attention, that they like to receive demonstrations of affections, and if they are told about it they say: 'Dear me! Of course, I love you! Didn't you know that?' That is how Maud puts it, but Maud is so terribly matter-of-fact and worldly! I would never be surprised to hear that she did the wooing!"

Another thoughtful glance in the mirror.

"It is a very simple thing to do, yet I do not care to do it! But I cannot let it go on vaguely, and if I don't take some action, Maud will carry out her threat of forcing her dear hubby to speak to Laurence, and I should never have the courage to face him after that! I'll do it!"

So the next time Mr. Laurence Alleyne called he detected a difference in the reception accorded to him by Miss Daisy Braidwood; she was not quite so diffident, she met his somewhat cool and "take-it-for-granted" attentions boldly and as if she attached no importance to them. He did not stay long on that occasion, and the slight uneasiness which had taken possession of him soon disappeared. Two evenings later he was to be at Mr. Braidwood's princely residence once more, to be a member of a small party.

He was again struck by the manner of Daisy Braidwood.

"What's the matter with the girl?" he mused, casting furtive glances at her, unconscious of the fact that Daisy was watching him. "She seems altered."

Laurence seized the first opportunity of a *tête-à-tête* with Daisy; she helped him to gain the opportunity and then the campaign began.

"Do you know, Mr. Alleyne," she began in the most business-like style, "I have wanted to talk with you on a subject which rather fascinates me, and to learn your views. You are a man of learning, you have studied a great deal, as you must do for your profession. What do you think of Platonic friendship?"

She looked at him coolly, with the air of a woman whom no masculine blandishments can touch, although inwardly she was quaking and telling herself that he would consider her very forward. Laurence started and gazed at her in perplexity.

"You mean friendship between man and woman without love, just as man becomes a firm friend to another man, and woman towards woman," he replied slowly. "I have never speculated on that subject, Miss Braidwood, so I am at a loss how to reply."

His tone betrayed anxiety, but Daisy was too occupied with her task to observe it. It was not so simple as she had anticipated, to talk to the man you love about Platonic friendships for the sole purpose of inducing him to declare himself.

"I half wish I hadn't begun!" she thought. Aloud she said: "I know that some great thinkers believe it to be an impossibility, but I see no reason for regarding it as impossible. Now, take two people, young people—er—like you and—and, well, me."

Daisy stopped; her throat was dry and she was getting into difficulties at the very start. She recognised that her breakdown had rather spoiled the look of the thing, so she bravely continued the argument, although she felt the colour rising.

"Now, we two, we like each other's society and enjoy a chat together, and we have certain favourite subjects. We can talk and discuss, without—can't we?"

"Y-e-s, I suppose we can," assented Laurence dubiously. "Really, Miss Braidwood, I haven't studied the subject at all, so I expect I cut a sorry figure in this argument and I fear that you will think me very dense!"

"Oh, dear!" thought Daisy in despair. "I don't think it will work. He doesn't take the discussion in the way I want him to do, and in the end he will go away and think me just horrid; and if he really loves me, he won't say so!"

"I am waiting to hear more about it, Miss Braidwood."

"Oh, yes!" gasped Daisy, recalled from her not too pleasant reflections by this remark. "Let me see, I was saying—yes! We could talk and laugh and—generally be excellent friends and be helpful to one another, and all that, without falling in love, without expecting that we should ever be nearer relations. Take yourself, for instance." Daisy had to pause here and make a great effort. "You have already shown that friendship is possible without love, for you have never attempted to show affection. I don't suppose I have made myself very clear, Mr. Alleyne, because I am not a debater, but that's what I mean."

Daisy was very hot when she had finished this rather incoherent speech; she looked hot, too, although she pretended to be very cool, and she looked very pretty in her confusion. Alleyne gazed at her, his fingers twitching nervously; then he grew calm and spoke steadily.

"Oh, it is quite clear! It is possible for you to be the best of friends to me without being so foolish as to fall in love with me. Most people would say that we were on a very awkward subject, and one that might well lead to the destruction of the theory of Platonic friendship by our doing the very thing which, as you say, we are not likely to do. But you are too level-headed to do anything so absurd!"

If Daisy had been more composed, she would have understood that he was non-committal and had, in fact, said nothing, but she was too much worried.

"It's a failure!" she murmured. "I wish I hadn't tried it. It must be that he doesn't love me. Well, it is better that I should know it!"

The thought that Laurence Alleyne did not love her, that her affection had gone out to him unbidden, filled her with dismay. A lump came into her throat, her heart beat painfully fast, she felt faint and, notwithstanding all her efforts, her eyes became moist with tears. She arose and turned towards an open window.

"I must go into the garden to get a little air," she said in a low voice. "It is too warm here!"

She passed hurriedly through the window, leaving him in the room, and sped towards a secluded spot in order to relieve her feelings with a good cry. She was cross with Maud, with herself, with Laurence; she sat down on a seat in the darkness and buried her face in her pocket handkerchief.

A hand touched her shoulder, causing her to start up with a cry of surprise and dismay.

"Does the idea of Platonic friendship make you cry, Daisy?" asked a voice which she recognised as Laurence's.

"Does the idea of pleasant companionship, without love, seem less attractive now? Let me tell you my opinion, dearest, before you reply; I have formed it since the beginning of the argument. I think it is impossible in one instance, at least! Now tell me what you think, truly!"

He gently pushed aside the handkerchief, took her in his arms and pressed her close to his heart, the better to hear her reply. That answer evidently satisfied him that she was not

wholly pledged to the theory of Platonic friendship, for he kissed her again and again, and she made no objection.

"I thought you were in earnest at first, and it gave me a shock!" admitted Laurence. "I saw how easily a man may lose a woman, and deservedly lose her, by becoming so wrapped up in his studies or business as to forget that attention and acts indicative of his love for her are so much waste of time. It is neglect, nothing else, and a man has no right to neglect his loved one. He thrusts his love too far down, and not until the object of his love is lost to him, does he realise what he has done. I am luckier than some men, for I discovered my error before it was too late, thanks to your views on—"

"Please don't!" she exclaimed, ashamed. "I wonder how I could have been led away by Maud to such an extent. I feel so horribly mean!"

"I guessed, before you were half-way through, that your sister had been egging you on. It was not your disposition to act in that manner, and Mrs. Halifax is more—up-to-date! Still, I am thankful to her for causing the little comedy to be played. Supposing that I had not lost you altogether by my neglect, I might have brought much unhappiness upon you and myself after marriage by that neglect. Now it will be different, thanks to—"

She looked at him reproachfully; he could see the expression on her face in the light that streamed through the window which they were now approaching.

"Thanks to Maud!" he said with a laugh, as he led her from the stream of light and kissed her passionately. "We will show our gratitude to her by giving her a volume of essays on the subject, written by someone who knows nothing about it."

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Why They Were There.

"WHAT a lot of those dear, charming hospital nurses one sees about just now." "Yes, football season's on again."

Before or After Taking?

HE: "Here is a picture of my wife." SHE: "Before or after taking?" HE: "What do you mean? Before or after taking what?" SHE: "You."

He Earned the Right.

HE: "Tell me, confidentially, how much did that bonnet cost you?" SHE: "George, there is but one way in which you can obtain the right to inspect my millinery bills." He popped.

By Moonlight.

SHE (waxing sentimental): "What a beautiful thing is the soul, Algernon." HE (unromantic): "By Jove, yes; and if we're having soles for supper let us hurry in to them, for it's chilly out here in the blessed moonlight."

Broken off the Habit.

MISS LAFIN: "What has become of our friend, Mr. Clay?" MR. RAND: "He has taken employment in a powder mill for six months." MISS LAFIN: "How strange!" MR. RAND: "Not at all. He wished to break himself of smoking."

Always Kissing.

SHE (sentimentally): "In the spring all nature smiles, the birds woo, lovers kiss; but ah! now comes winter." HE: "I know more things that kiss all the year round, and never change." SHE: "Impossible! What?" HE (calmly): "Billiard balls."

Wanted a Different Light.

MISS COYGI: "Jack Seftleigh told me last night that I ought to accept him because he was willing to prove his love for me." HER FRIEND: "What did you say?" MISS COYGI: "I said I couldn't see it in that light." HER FRIEND: "Then what did he say?" MISS COYGI: "Nothing. He just turned the light out."

The Worm Didn't Murmur.

TENDER-HEARTED DAMSEL: "I think fishing is cruel. The idea of putting a worm to the torture of having a hook run through him is awful to me." WITHERBY: "It doesn't hurt the worm." TENDER-HEARTED DAMSEL: "How do you know?" WITHERBY: "How? Why I've put worms on hooks dozens of times and never heard a murmur from them."

Easy to Order More.

"I'm almost afraid, Miss Squeers," said the impecunious young man who had taken her to an after-theatre supper for which he had been hoarding money for months, "I'm almost afraid to ask you to eat such a meal as this just before going to bed." "Oh, never mind," replied Miss Squeers, smiling pleasantly. "If it doesn't answer we can easily order some more, you know."

The Rejected's Revenge.

MISS ELDERLY: "I am sorry to say no. I should think you could read my refusal in my face." The Rejected: "I am not very expert at reading between the lines."

The Flask Would Do.

SHORT-SIGHTED SHE: "There, we've trudged up here on purpose to admire the beauties of Nature. I've forgotten to bring a glass with me." Unpoetical HE: "Never mind, we can drink out of the flask."

Getting Her Promise.

"You say she refused you a number of times?" "Yes." "Well, how did you finally get her consent?" "I have kept a diary for a number of years, and I promised to let her read it after we were married."

A Yacht Would Have Been Different.

HE: "Won't you be my wife? I have paddled my own canoe for years, and feel sure that I can support you." SHE: "Canoe! Nonsense! If you had said you had sailed your own yacht for years I might have considered your proposal."

A Last Wish.

HE (trembling): "I have one last wish to ask you be—before we part in an—anger for ever." SHE (sobbing): "Wha—what is it, Geo—George?" HE: "Wi—will you—meet me next Th—Thursday as u—usual?" SHE: "I wi—will, George!"

One Walk they Wouldn't Take.

MARIE: "Women are fast leaving their own walks of life, aren't they?" BILLSON: "Yes; but there is one walk which they will always leave to man." MARIE: "What's that?" BILLSON: "Up and down the bedroom hall the night with a restless baby."

Too Soon to Begin.

"MR. STAYLATE," she murmured, "do you remember when, in 1902, we sat up to see the new year in?" "Yes," he replied rapturously. "Well—don't you—don't you—" "Don't I what?" "Don't you think we are beginning rather early this year?"

She'd Had Experience.

"I KNOW what I'll do," said the girl whose bashful lover would not propose. "I'll go out as a trained nurse." "But that is a profession. You know nothing about it," he rejoined. "Haven't I had six months' experience sitting up at nights with you?"

Appealed to a Higher Court.

"WASN'T that young Mr. Tiff who left the house as I came in?" asked the judge of his eldest daughter. "Yes, papa." "Did I not issue an injunction against his coming here any more?" "Yes, papa; but he appealed to a higher court, and mamma said 'yes.'"

Attractive Anyhow.

"YOU say," murmured Genevieve sweetly, "that you were led to love me when you first saw me in rational dress." "Yes," said Algernon, as he pressed her to his bosom. "I knew that if you didn't look very much of a fright in knickerbockers you must be very beautiful!"

Oscillating or Osculating.

"MABEL," said the girl's mother, "that young man writes very nice letters. But I wish that his chirography were a little less obscure." "Why, mamma?" "I can't quite make out whether he says he looks forward to the time when he will be oscillating in a hammock or osculating in a hammock."

Coat Had to Last.

"MY darling," she murmured, "you know that I love you. Is this not enough for the present? Be assured that I will fix a day for our wedding as soon as it is possible." "I nat's right, Miranda," doggedly replied the young man, "but I hope you will remember that I've got to be married in this black coat, and it won't last for ever."

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THE ALBERT GATE MYSTERY.

A Romance of To-day.

By LOUIS TRACY.

Author of "The Final War," "The Lost Lady Delia," etc.



The Under-Secretary's Instructions.

"A sudden frenzy seized me at those words, and I endeavoured to smash the heads of my two gaolers together by throwing them off their balance outwards, and then rapidly contracting my arms. Thereupon I made another discovery. A cord lying loosely round my neck was suddenly tightened, and I was thrown back choking upon the bed as a fourth man, of whose presence I was unconscious, was stationed behind me and held the noose in his hand.

"It was some time before I recovered my breath or my speech.

"At last I was allowed to rise again, and Dubois said with a quiet smile which was intensely irritating :

"By this time, Mr. Talbot, you should have realised that you have not fallen into the hands of children. We do not wish to do you a mischief. Indeed, it would not suit our purpose. It is far from our desire to quarrel with the British Government or to take the life of one of its rising young diplomatists. This dispute in which you are unfortunately involved is between a certain section of the Sultan's subjects and that potentate himself. But really you must recognise the absolute helplessness of your position. You have just received a stern reminder. Let it be the last, for if you give us any more trouble we may end a difficult situation by effectively cutting your throat. Such an operation would be distasteful to us and most distressing for you. So please do not compel us to perform it."

"I glared at him viciously. Speak I could not, but he paid no further attention to me, and his make-up was now pronounced to be perfect by his critical companion.

"You make a very handsome Englishman; *mon vieux*," she cried, coquettishly setting her head on one side and glancing first at him and then at me."

"The cat," cried Edith. "She evidently thought you good-looking, Jack."

Talbot blushed and laughed at the involuntary slip.

"I am not responsible for her opinions," he said. "I am simply telling you what happened.

"Dubois left the room," he continued, "and returned in a few moments, dressed in an English tweed suit, with a large ulster and a deer-stalker cap. Upon my honour he was so like me that, notwithstanding my rage, I was compelled to smile at him. He caught my transient mood for an instant.

"Ah," he cried in French, "that is better. The surgical operation is beginning to take effect. You see the joke?"

"It is a somewhat bitter species of humour," I replied. "Perhaps in the future it may have a sequel."

"Life is made up of sequels," was the airy answer. "Events generally turn out to be so completely opposite to that which I anticipated that I no longer give them a thought. I live

only for the present, and at this moment I am victorious. But now, Mr. Talbot, I purpose taking a little trip to the Continent on your account. I hope, therefore, for your sake, that the Channel will be smooth."

"With a mock bow of much politeness he took his leave, carrying with him the overcoat containing the case of diamonds. I have never seen him since. Last night in the Foreign Office I met Captain Gaultier, who told me of the incident on the steamer. I readily forgave him for the mistake he had made with reference to my appearance, but it was too bad that he should imagine I would bolt to Paris with a lady of theatrical appearance in broad daylight."

"Yes," cried Fairholme, "if it had been the night steamer—"

"Bobby!" exclaimed Edith.

"Oh, I meant, of course," stammered Fairholme, "that by night Gaultier might have been more easily mistaken."

"Well, and what happened at the Foreign Office?"

Brett's question recalled the younger people to the gravity of the conclave.

"First of all," said Talbot, "Fairholme drove me straight home, where it was necessary to give some slight preliminary explanation before I made a too sudden appearance, so I remained in the cab outside whilst Fairholme went in and found Edith."

"Ah!" said Brett, still surveying the ceiling; but there was so much meaning in his voice that this time it was the turn of the young couple to blush.

"We did not take long to explain matters," continued Talbot. "I sent off messengers post-haste to the Under-Secretary and others suggesting that if possible we should meet at the Foreign Office. Within an hour my chiefs were good enough to fall in with my views, and therefore I had an opportunity to tell them my story exactly as I have repeated it to you. The result is that I carry with me a letter from the Under-Secretary in which he explains his views. I am already acquainted with his reasons, but I have no doubt that he puts them before you quite clearly."

He handed a letter to Brett. Its contents were laconic, but unmistakable :

"The inquiry upon which you are engaged," it read, "must be conducted with the utmost secrecy and discretion. The gravest political importance is attached to its outcome. No trouble or expense should be allowed to interfere with the restoration of the diamonds to their rightful owner. The British Government will regard this as a most valuable service to the State, and Mr. Talbot is commissioned to place at your disposal the full resources of the Foreign Office. You will also find that his Majesty's Ministers throughout Europe have been advised to give you every assistance, whilst there is little reason to doubt that the various European

Governments will be ready to offer you all possible support. The first consideration is the restoration of the gems intact to the Sultan; the second, absolute secrecy as to the whole of the circumstances."

"Whew!" whistled Brett. "Read between the lines this communication shows the serious nature of our quest. If those diamonds are not recovered, a revolution in Turkey is the almost certain outcome, and Heaven alone knows what that means to the European Powers most concerned."

"If you succeed," said Sir Hubert Fitzjames, "the Government will make you a baronet."

"If you succeed," growled Talbot, "I will get even with that Frenchman."

"And when you succeed," said Fairholme, in a matter-of-fact tone, that indicated the wild improbability of any other outcome, "Edith and I will get married!"

"All Goes Well."

BRETT now deemed it advisable to take the commissary of police fully into his confidence. When that worthy personage had recovered from the surprise evoked by the barrister's communication, he promptly suggested that every personage in Paris connected even remotely with the mystery—Grosjean, the Turks, the waiter at the Café Noir, and even the little thief "Le Ver"—should be arrested and subjected to a cross-examination.

But Brett would not hear of this proceeding. He quite firmly reminded the commissary that the wishes of the British Government must be respected in this matter, and the proposed wholesale arrests of persons, some of whom were in no way cognisant of the crime, would assuredly lead to publicity and the appearance of sensational statements in the Press.

"But, monsieur," cried the excitable Frenchman, "something must be done. Even you, I presume, intend to lay hands upon the principal men. While they are wandering about the country, each hour makes it easier for them to secrete the diamonds so effectually that no matter what may be the result the Sultan will never recover his property."

"Calm yourself," I beg, said the barrister, with difficulty compelling himself to reason with this excitable policeman. "You speak as though we had in our hands every jot of evidence to secure the conviction of Dubois and his associates before a judge."

"But is it not so?" screamed the other.

"No; it is very far from being so. Let us look at the facts. In the first place the Turks will not speak. They are political fanatics. The moment a policeman lays hands upon them they become dumb. Torture would bring nothing from them but lies. Then we have the two people who acted as Mr. Talbot's gaolers. What charge can we prefer against them? Merely one of illegal detention, whilst they would probably defend themselves by saying that Talbot was represented to them as a lunatic whose restraint was necessary for family reasons. Then we come to Dubois himself and the fair Mlle. Beaucaille. In the first place, you may be certain that they have provided a strong alibi to prove that they were in Paris on the days when we were certain they were in London. Who can identify them?"

The lady we must rule out of court at once. The only persons who saw her were Mr. Talbot, and Captain Gaultier, the latter of whom has already placed on record the statement that he would not recognise her again. Talbot's evidence is stronger, but I would not like to hear him subjected to the merciless cross-examination of an able counsel. As for Dubois, there are two inspectors of police and a dozen intelligent Metropolitan constables who would be forced to swear that he was not the man who entered Albert Gate on the night of the murder in company with the other Turks. I tell you candidly, monsieur, that in my opinion the case would not only break down very badly, but Mr. Talbot would

leave the court under grave suspicion, whilst I would be regarded by the public as a meddling idiot."

"Then what are we to do?" said the commissary, piteously throwing out his hands and shrugging his shoulders with the eloquent French gesture that betokens utter bewilderment.

"Difficult though it may be, we must first accomplish the main part of our work. In other words, we must secure the diamonds before we collar the murderers."

The Frenchman was silent for a moment. At last he said submissively:

"In what way can I help?"

"By procuring for me from the chief of your department an authorisation to call in the aid of the police when and where I may desire their assistance. This, of course, will render necessary on his part some inquiry before I am intrusted with such an important document. The British Embassy in Paris and your own Foreign Office will quickly supply you with the reasons why this power should be given to me."

"But what of the house in the Rue Bonbonnerie?"

"You anticipated my next request. Whilst you are looking to that letter you must place at my disposal two of your most trusty agents. In their company Lord Fairholme and I purpose visiting the house to-night."

They were conversing in the commissary's office at a late hour after Brett had quitted his friends in the Grand Hotel.

Within a few minutes the two Englishmen and their French companions were standing outside No. 41, Rue Bonbonnerie, and they found that Monsieur de Lisle kept a small shop, whose only significant feature was a placard announcing that letters might be addressed there.

"Oh," said Brett, when he noticed this legend, "this is simple. We need not waste much time here."

The four men walked inside, crowding the narrow space before a diminutive counter. The proprietor was supping in style, as they could perceive through the glass top of the door which communicated with the sitting-room at the back. His feast consisted of a tankard of thin wine, half a loaf of black bread, and two herrings.

The man seemed vastly surprised at the sudden incursion of customers. He came out looking puzzled and alarmed.

"Have you any letters here for Monsieur Jean Beaujolais?" said Brett.

"No, monsieur."

"Have you received any letters for a person of that name?"

"No, monsieur."

"I suppose you never heard the name of Jean Beaujolais before in your life?"

"I think not, monsieur."

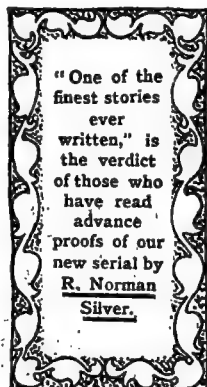
"Then," exclaimed Brett, turning quietly away, "I fear you must be arrested. These two gentlemen"—and he nodded towards the detectives—"will take you to the prefecture, where perhaps your memory may improve."

The man blanched visibly. His teeth chattered, and his hands shook as if with an ague, whilst he nervously arranged some small objects on the counter.

"I cry your pardon, monsieur," he stammered, "but you will understand that I receive letters at my shop for a small fee, and I cannot remember the names of all my customers. I will search with pleasure among those now in my possession to see if there are any for M. Beaujolais."

"You are simply incriminating yourself," said Brett sternly. "If your excuse were a genuine one you would first have looked among your letters before answering so glibly that the name of Beaujolais was unfamiliar."

"I beg of you to listen," cried the dismayed shopkeeper. "I had no idea you were from the prefecture, otherwise I would have answered you in the first instance. There have been letters here for Monsieur Beaujolais. They came from



London. He called for them three or perhaps four times. The last letter arrived yesterday morning. It is here now. I have not seen Monsieur Beaujolais since the previous evening."

He took from a drawer a packet of letters tied together with string, and the handwriting betrayed the contents of most of them. They evidently dealt with that species of the tender passion which find its outlet in the agony column or in fictitious addresses.

One of the detectives did not trust to Monsieur de Lisle's examination, but seized the bundle and went through its contents carefully, but this time Monsieur de Lisle was speaking the truth.

There was but one letter addressed to Beaujolais, and this was the only one which bore a foreign postmark. Brett tore it open. It contained a single sheet of note-paper, without a date or address, or any words save these, scrawled across the centre—

"Tout va bien." (All goes well.)

He placed the document and its envelope in his pocket-book, and then fixed his keen eyes upon the shopkeeper's pallid face.

"What sort of person is Monsieur Beaujolais?"

The man was still so nervous that he could hardly speak.

"I am not good at descriptions," he began.

So Brett helped.

"Was he a Frenchman, about my height, elegant in appearance, well built, with long, thin hands, and straight, tapering fingers, with very fair skin and high colour, dark hair and large eyes set deeply beneath well-marked eyebrows?"

"That is he to the life," cried the shopkeeper. "Monsieur must know him well. I recall him now exactly, but I could not for a hundred francs have described him so accurately."

"How long have you known him?" broke in Brett.

"Let me think," mused the man, who had now somewhat recovered from his alarm. "He came here one day last week—I think it was Thursday, because that day my daughter Marie—no matter what Marie did, I remember the date quite well now. He came in and asked me if I did not receive letters for a fee. I said 'Yes,' and told him that I charged ten centimes per letter. He gave me his name, and thereafter called regularly to obtain the inclosure from London. He always handed me half a franc and would never take any change."

"Was he alone?"

"Invariably, monsieur."

"Thank you. You will not be arrested to-night. I think you have told the truth."

On the Cannebière.

THE shopkeeper's protestations that he had given every assistance in his power followed them into the street.

Brett dismissed the two detectives and returned to the hotel, where he and Fairholme found Edith and her brother sitting up for them. When Talbot heard the contents of the letter he remarked: "I suppose that 'All goes well,' means that I am still a prisoner?"

"Undoubtedly," said the barrister. "The letter was posted in the Haymarket. It came from your French host. I wonder what he will write now? By the way, where is he? Did you lose sight of the couple after your escape?"

"I did," laughed Talbot. "But Inspector Winter did not. By some mysterious means he learnt all about Fairholme's action in smashing in the door, whilst I was at the Foreign Office that night, and he promptly arrested both the man and the woman."

"Winter is a perfect terror," said Brett. "He dreams of handcuffs and penal servitude. I hope this couple will not be brought to trial though, or at any rate, that your name will not be mixed up in it."

"Oh, no. As soon as I heard the Under-Secretary's wishes, I promptly communicated with Scotland Yard. The Frenchman and his wife will be remanded on a mysterious charge of felony, and held in durance vile until their testimony is wanted, should we ever capture Dubois."

At Brett's request, detectives were hunting through Paris all that night and next day for a sign of Hussein ul Mulk and

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his Turkish friends. But these gentlemen had vanished as completely as if the earth had swallowed them up.

This was a strange thing. Although Paris is a cosmopolitan city, a party of Turks, only one of whom could speak French, should be discovered with tolerable rapidity in view of the fact that the French police maintain such a watch upon the inhabitants.

It was not until Brett and his four companions quitted the train at Marseilles late at night and the barrister received a telegram from the commissary announcing that the search made by the police had yielded no results, that he suddenly recalled the existence of a doorless and windowless room in the Café Noir.

Curiously enough he had omitted to make any mention of this strange apartment in his recital to the official. He would not trust to the discretion of the Telegraph Department, so on reaching the Hotel du Louvre et de la Paix he succeeded with some difficulty in ringing up the commissary on the long-distance telephone.

Having acquainted the police officer with the exact position of the hidden apartment, he ended by saying :

"Continue inquiries throughout Paris during the whole of to-morrow. Do not visit the Cabaret Noir for the purpose of police inspection until a late hour—long after midnight—when the café is empty and the boulevard comparatively deserted. It is only a mere guess on my part. The Turks may not be there. If they are, they should be set at liberty and not questioned. Tell them they owe their escape to me. If you do not find them you may make other discoveries of general interest to the police. But, above all things, I do not wish you to interfere with Grosjean or his house until the next twenty-four hours have elapsed."

The commissary assured him that his desires would be respected, and soon afterwards Brett went upstairs with the full determination to secure a long and uninterrupted night's sleep, of which he stood much in need.

He had reached the sitting room reserved for the use of the party when Talbot and Lord Fairholme burst in upon him excitedly.

"We have seen her!" gasped the earl.

"Seen whom?" demanded the barrister.

"Mademoiselle Beaucaire," cried Talbot; "the woman who accompanied Dubois in his flight from London. I recognised her instantly. I could pick her out among a million as the same person who so coolly made up Dubois to represent me, whilst I was lying tied on the bed in that flat."

In their eagerness the two men had forgotten to close the door. Brett ran to it, and looked out into the passage to learn if their words had perchance been overheard. No one was in sight. He closed the door behind him when he re-entered the room, and said quietly :

"How did you happen to meet her?"

"Whilst you were wrestling with the telephone," said Fairholme, "Edith and Jack and I went to the door of the hotel to have a look at the people passing in the Cannebière. None of us have ever been in Marseilles before, you know. We were gazing at the crowd, when suddenly Jack gripped my arm and said: 'There she is! Look at the woman, quick!' He pointed to a tall, well-dressed female, wrapped up in a fur cloak, and wearing a large feather hat. Luckily her veil was up, and the electric light fell fair upon her as she passed. She was undoubtedly La Belle Chasseuse, and I bet you anything you like she had just come away from the music-hall where she is performing."

"Did she see you?" demanded Brett excitedly.

"Not a bit; she was too busy gazing at the tram-cars that were passing. She was evidently on the look-out for some particular line."

"What happened next?" demanded the barrister. "Where is Miss Talbot?"

"Edith has gone after her," said Fairholme.

"What!" cried Brett, more startled than he cared to own.

"Yes," broke in Talbot eagerly. "She heard my words and instantly decided to follow her. She said that the woman knew both of us, and might easily detect us, but she, Edith,

was unknown to her, and would never be suspected. She simply forced us to come and tell you, and then darted off like a greyhound before we could stop her."

Brett forced himself to say calmly—

"I always knew that Miss Talbot had brains, but still I wish she had not taken this risk. Nevertheless, your chance discovery and her prompt action may be invaluable to us."

"But what must we do?" exclaimed the impetuous Fairholme. "We cannot allow Edith to go wandering off around Marseilles by herself at this hour of the night. I have always heard that this town is a perfectly awful place. What a fool I was not to follow her at once."

"Miss Talbot has acted quite rightly," said Brett decisively. "We must simply remain here until she returns. There is not the slightest ground for alarm. A woman who could act with such ready judgment is well able to take care of herself. Unless I am much mistaken, we shall see her within the hour."

It was well for the peace of mind of the younger men that Sir Hubert Fitzjames had gone to his room soon after the party reached the hotel. Had the irascible baronet known of his niece's mission, no power on earth could have restrained him from setting every policeman in Marseilles on her track forthwith.

And so they kept their vigil, striving to talk unconcernedly, but watching the clock with feverish impatience until Edith should appear.

"Marie."

MARSEILLES is one of the most picturesque cities in the world.

Its streets cluster round an ancient harbour, famous before history was writ, or climb the sides of the steep hills that surround a land-locked bay.

In the suburbs Marseilles is modern enough, but the chief thoroughfare, known to all who read, the famous and ever busy Cannebière, plunges rapidly downhill until it empties itself on the crowded quays that surround the old port.

With the newer Marseilles of the Joliette—well found in wharfs and warehouses, steam cranes and railway lines—the town beloved of the Phœnicians has no concern. There is a touch of modern ugliness in the tiny maritime refuge which is barely half the size of the Serpentine. Lofty, old-fashioned, half-ruined houses throng close to its rugged quays.

At night this quarter of the turbulent city wears an air of intense mystery. The side streets are narrow and tortuous. Dark courts and alleys twist in every conceivable direction, whilst the brightness of the many wine shops that face each other across the tideless harbour only serves to enhance the squalid gloom that forms the most marked characteristic of the buildings clustered behind them.

Edith Talbot, intent upon the pursuit of a woman so dramatically bound up with the mystery affecting her brother, paid heed to no consideration save the paramount one, that the hurrying figure in front must be kept in sight.

Contrary to the opinions expressed by the two men, Mlle. Beaucaire did not board a passing tramcar. To Edith's eyes she seemed to be eagerly watching for some person who might pass in one of the small open carriages which in Marseilles take the place of the London hansom. Even as she rapidly walked down the crowded street mademoiselle closely scrutinised each vehicle that overtook her, and once, at a busy crossing, she deliberately stopped so as to render the task easier. Edith, of course, slackened her pace, and it was not until that moment that she became aware how incongruous was her appearance at such an hour in such a thoroughfare.

Much taller than the average Frenchwoman, neatly dressed in an English tailor-made costume, with her smart straw hat and well-gloved hands, Miss Talbot naturally attracted the curious gaze of the passers by.

Instantly it occurred to her that some disguise was absolutely necessary if she would not court attention which might be fatal to her enterprise. It chanced that where she stood for a moment a fruit-seller occupied a tiny shop, squeezed tightly between a church and a restaurant. The interior

was dark enough, for a couple of flaring naphtha lamps were so disposed as to cast their flickering brilliancy over the baskets of fruit and vegetables, displayed in the window or crowded together on the pavement.

The woman inside had a kindly and contented face, cherry ripe in cheek and lips, and from a pair of deep-set dark eyes she looked out quizzically upon the hurrying crowd.

Assuring herself with one fleeting glance that La Belle Chasseuse still remained motionless and intent at the crossing, Edith darted inside the shop. She produced a sovereign.

"I have not much French money," she said hurriedly, "but this is worth twenty-five francs. Can you let me have a large dark shawl? I do not care whether or not it is old or worn. It is necessary that I should remain out for some few minutes longer, and I do not wish to court observation."

Even as she spoke she removed her straw hat and eagerly tore off her gloves. The Frenchwoman saw that one of her own sex, English, and consequently mad, desired to screen her appearance from too inquisitive eyes.

It was sufficient for her that there should be a spice of romance in the request. With one hand she closed upon the sovereign; with the other she dived into a recess beneath the counter and produced the very article Edith wanted.

"But certainly, mademoiselle," she cried. "See. It will cover you to the waist."

Edith advanced another pace into the darkest corner of the shop, quickly arranged the shawl over her head and shoulders and then, hastily murmuring her thanks, rushed forth into the street again, leaving her hat and gloves behind her in her haste.

The fruit-seller was far too wise a woman to call after the other and apprise her of her loss.

"It must be serious, this adventure," she mused. "And yet the novelists say that the English are so cold! For me, now, I think that women are very much alike all over the world."

And with this bit of Provencal philosophy she picked up the discarded articles and discovered, to her joy, that they must be worth at least ten francs.

"Thirty-five francs for an old shawl is a good night's work," she murmured. "Who could dream of such fortune at this hour? To-morrow I will buy a candle and place it in front of the statue of Notre Dame de la Garde."

Meanwhile Edith was just in time to see Mlle. Beaucaire either abandon her search or alter her method in some way, for the lady in question once more resumed her progress towards the old harbour, in whose placid bosom could now be seen the reflections of numberless lights from the small promontory beyond, crowned with the Fort St. Nicholas and the Château du Pharo.

Looking neither right nor left, but hastening onwards with rapid strides, mademoiselle crossed the rough pavement of the Quai de la Fraternité, bearing away diagonally towards the left.

But if the Frenchwoman was a good walker, Edith Talbot was a better one, and now that she no longer feared notice—for she draped the large shawl as elegantly about her shoulders as any woman in Marseilles—she decided to adopt a little strategy. Instead of keeping directly behind mademoiselle she broke into a run under the shadow of the houses. By thus making up ground she approached the narrow street towards which the Frenchwoman was heading almost simultaneously with her quarry, but apparently from an opposite direction. The aspect of the thoroughfare through which the two women now sped was forbidding in the extreme. The houses were many storeys in height, of disreputable appearance and so close together on both sides that were other conditions equal an active man might easily spring from one room into another across the street.

The walls appeared to be honeycombed with doors and windows, while an indescribable number of shutters, balconies, projecting poles and clothes-lines created such a medley in the darkness, which was only made visible by a solitary bracket lamp, that Edith felt some anxiety as to whether or not she would be able to recognise the house into which

Grew Old in a Trance.

IN America, quite recently, a girl, aged nineteen, fell into a trance, which lasted twenty days. During that time her hair turned grey, wrinkles formed about her features, and she gradually assumed the appearance of an old woman. On coming out of her stupor she only lived for a few days. Another singular case of a woman growing prematurely old, but which, fortunately, ended in a happier way, was that of Miss May Musson, of Breach Road, Marlpool, her peculiar condition having been brought about by indigestion and anæmia, of which, luckily, Chas. Forde's bile beans completely cured her. "I went to look more like an old woman at the end of my days than a woman of twenty-two years," she said, "for indigestion and anæmia completely changed my appearance. I became so ill that I could not eat a morsel of food, and oftentimes I was so weak that I could not walk even a short distance without feeling exhausted. No matter what kind of food I took I could never enjoy it, because pain invariably attacked me after eating. I had a severe pain in my left side, which hurt me whenever I moved, and I was told that I had an enlarged liver. Whatever it was which occasioned the pain I suffered, it seemed as if nothing I took would do me any good. Anæmia set in, and I was almost in despair when I saw Chas. Forde's bile beans advertised in the newspapers, and made up my mind to give them a trial. When I had finished the first box I felt better and got more. Each box of beans made me better and better, until the neighbours began to notice how vastly I was improving. First one and then another would say, 'You do look different.' Whatever I look, I know I feel different. Never in all my life have I felt so well as I do at the present moment. I am sure I owe my life to Chas. Forde's bile beans. I shall do all I can to let others know of them, and I have already recommended them to several friends." It is by effecting such cures as the above that Chas. Forde's bile beans for biliousness have made their world-wide reputation. They are without doubt superior to all other known medicines for indigestion, anæmia, dizziness, pains in the side, chest and back, palpitation, liver and kidney disorders, constipation, piles, headache, debility, nervousness, and female ailments. All chemists stock them, or you may obtain post free from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., Red Cross Street, London, E.C., by sending prices—one and three halfpence or two and nine.



GIVEN AWAY

WITH THIS WEEK'S

HOME NOTES

(No 474),

A PAPER PATTERN

of this

CHEMISE

Of all Bookstalls and Newsagents.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

mademoiselle disappeared, should her destination be close at hand.

There were, of course, many other people in the street besides themselves, else Edith's self-imposed piece of espionage would have been rendered difficult, if not impossible.

Men, women, and children lounged about the doorways and kept up a constant cackle of conversation in a mysterious patois which Miss Talbot, though an excellent French scholar, could make nothing of. The presence of these people naturally shielded her from the direct observation of La Belle Chasseuse, but, nevertheless, threatened a slight danger should it be necessary for her to loiter on the way, for she well understood that in such a locality each person was known to the other, and the advent of a stranger could not fail to arouse curiosity.

Soon after passing beneath the lamp mademoiselle vanished into a doorway.

Edith perceived to her joy that at this point there was no group of loungers. Indeed, for a few yards the street was empty.

Keeping her eyes sedulously fixed upon the exact spot where the Frenchwoman disappeared, she reached the door, and, after a moment's hesitation, stepped lightly into the interior darkness.

The narrow entrance was at once lessened to half its width by a staircase. She listened intently, and could hear the other woman ascending the second flight of stairs.

At the next landing mademoiselle paused and knocked three times.

Presumably in reply to a question within, she murmured something which Edith could not catch and was at once admitted. The shooting of a rusty bolt supplied further evidence that the door was locked behind her.

M.R. 107.

Edith's next task was to identify the house. She stepped out into the street again and crossed to the opposite pavement. She looked up to the second storey, but, owing to the short distance—barely fourteen feet—that separated her from the house, she could discern nothing, save that the windows on that floor were closely shuttered.

She rapidly noted that the door was the third removed from the lamp. Whilst wondering what to do next, a couple of girls approached her. They were young and of course inquisitive. Without any dissimulation, they stood right in front of her and scrutinised her face, wondering, no doubt, who this tall and graceful new-comer could be.

"What is your name?" said one. "Where do you live? Have you just come here? Are you staying with old Mother Peter?"

With difficulty Edith caught the drift of their questions. But she answered smilingly:

"No, I do not live here, and I do not know Mother Peter. But I want you to tell me who lives in the house opposite?"

Her Parisian French greatly surprised the two girls, who giggled at each other, and one of them cried:

"Oh, here's a lark."

But they scented an intrigue, and were quite ready to give all the information in their power.

"A lot of people live there," said the elder one, trying with the ready tact of her nation to accommodate her words to the understanding of the stranger. "It all depends whom you want to know about. On the ground floor is Josef the barber, and his wife, with three little ones. It cannot be them, I am sure, and it cannot be Monsieur Duerot, who is their lodger, for he is seventy years old and a sacristan in the Church of the Sacred Heart. Then, on the first floor there are three men, not a woman amongst them. One is a bill-sticker, another a fisherman, and the third a waiter in the Café du Midi. I do not know their proper names. We call the bill-sticker 'Paste pot,' and the fisherman 'Crab,'

The waiter is called 'Thomas' in the café, but when a letter comes for him it is in another name. Then, on the second floor—by the way, Marie, who is it that lives on the second floor?"

Edith with difficulty restrained her excitement. She felt that if only these youngsters rattled on a little longer she might gain some valuable information.

Marie, thus appealed to, was evidently of a more cautious temperament than her companion.

"If the young lady will tell us why she wants to know, we may be able to help her?" she stipulated.

"Certainly," cried Edith, instantly resolving to pursue the tactics of the penny novelette. "I have been deserted. My lover has been taken away from me by another woman—at least, that is what I am informed. I do not wish to make any trouble about it. There are plenty as good men as he left in the world; but, on the other hand, I must not act unjustly. I have been told that he lives in this house—that he is living with her here at this moment, in fact. If I can make sure of it, I will go away and never set eyes upon him again unless by chance, and then you may be sure I will take no notice of him. I am not one of those silly girls who break their hearts over a faithless sweetheart."

Marie was reassured.

"I should think not," she said, with a sympathetic and defiant sniff.

"I had the very same experience last Sunday, when Philippe—the grocer's boy at the corner, you know—walked along the Corniche Road with a chit of a girl out of a shop. She thinks herself better than we are because she stands behind a counter, and I am sure she made eyes at Philippe one day when his master sent him there on an errand."

"Philippe must have had taste," broke in Edith. "But I am sorry I must hasten away. If you girls will tell me quickly all the other people that live in that house I will give you two francs each. That is all the money I have got."

She produced the coins, which she easily distinguished from the gold in her pocket by their size, and she knew that to appear too well supplied with money in that neighbourhood was to court danger, if not disaster, to her undertaking.

Both girls eagerly seized the 40-sous pieces.

"Oh, on the second floor," said Marie, "I am afraid you will find your young man. They are a funny couple that live there. They only came here on Monday. When did your young man leave you?"

"I saw him on Saturday."

"Where?"

This was a poser, but Miss Talbot answered desperately:

"At Lyon."

"What is he like?"

Another haphazard shot.

"He is tall and dark, and, oh, so good-looking, with a beautifully white skin and a pink complexion."

"That is he!" cried both girls together.

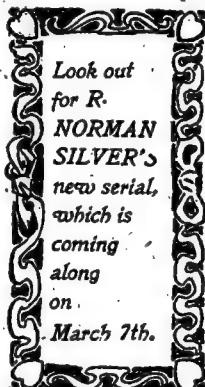
"The scoundrel! But tell me," went on Edith, whose excitement was readily construed as the pangs of jealousy, "who is the creature that lives with him?"

"We think she is a music-hall artiste," replied Marie. "At least, that is what the people say. I have not heard yet what hall she appears in. They say she is very pretty. Are you going to throw vitriol over her?"

"Not I," said Edith. "Do they live there alone?"

"Yes, quite alone. They rent the place from Père Didon. He owns most of the houses in this street, you know, and is a regular skin-flint. He won't let anyone get behind with their rent for an hour. He is old, so old, that you would not think that he could live another week, yet he is that keen after his francs you would imagine he was a young man anxious to get money for a gay life. You ought to

(Continued on page 228.)



Cure of Deafness in Advanced Age.

The Editor of the "Journal for the Deaf" points out the great mistake made by deaf people, past the prime of life, in thinking that, because of advancing years, they must not expect a restoration of hearing. Against this common opinion he puts numerous cases of persons (with names and addresses), 60, 70, and even 80 years old, cured by the Drouet Method of external application. In one case, a man 64 years old, the deafness was of the worst chronic form—so bad, indeed, a watch could not be heard ticking even when pressed close to the ear on either side. The restoration of hearing is described by the patient, Mr. H. Holt, 17 Fenton Road, Blackpool, as follows:—"I may say I am completely cured and shall be pleased to give my testimony to anyone, as I think the Drouet Treatment cannot be too widely known." Anyone interested in the treatment of any form of Deafness or Ear, Nose, or Throat ailment can obtain a free copy of the "Journal for the Deaf," by addressing the Secretary, Drouet Institute, 10 Marble Arch, London, W. The "Journal" also contains a Special Report Form by means of which anyone can obtain free advice as to treatment. The Editor, however, advises patients whenever possible, to attend the Institute for personal examination.

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FASHIONABLE LONG NECK-CHAIN, genuine 18-carat rolled gold (stamped), finished, elegant West End design; sacrifice, 9/6; approval before payment.
CURB CHAIN BRACE-LET, with padlock and safety chain; 18-carat, rolled gold (stamped and guaranteed), in velvet case; sacrifice, 7/6; approval before payment.
REAL DIAMOND and EMERALD doublet HALF-HOOP RING; large, lustrous stones, massive solid gold setting (hall-marked); weight 2½ dwts.; sacrifice, 21/-; approval willing.
MANDOLINE, genuine Italian (Stridente, Naples); very fine tone, real rosewood, pearl inlaid, in saddle-made case; sacrifice, 19/6; approval willing.
GENTS' 18-ct. Gold-cased KEYLESS HUNTER, jewelled movement, lever balance, extra timekeeper, 10 years' warranty; sacrifice, 10/6; approval willing.
ORGAN-TONE MELODEON, magnificent 26½" instrument. 12-fold bellows (meta bound), 3 sets steel brassy reeds, 4 acting stops, powerful tone; perfect order, sacrifice, 10/6; approval willing.
HANDSOME REAL MARBLE CLOCK, highly finished lever movement, 8in. high, in perfect order, guaranteed 10 years; sacrifice, 10/6; approval.

DARK RUSSIAN FUR MUFF & NECKLET to match, with large, bushy tails; never worn; sacrifice, 12/6 together; also another set of extra fine quality very handsome muff and necklet, accept 16/6, worth 3 guineas; approval willing.
LADY'S lustrous **DIAMOND & RUBY RING**, large, matchless double rubies and 8 real diamonds, solid gold, hall-marked setting; sacrifice, 12/6.
BRACELET; very handsome, 18-carat rolled gold; 3 rubies in flight; set lovely turquoise and pearls, in velvet case; accept 6/9; approval before payment.
NECKLET WITH HEART PENDANT, very pretty Princess of Wales rope pattern; heart set with pearls and turquoise; accept 9/6; approval.

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MRS. GEO. FULLER, who saved her husband.

This famous remedy has guided many a young man to sobriety and into the high road of fortune, and has saved the father, the brother, and the son.

If you send name and address to the Ward Chemical Company, 51 Century House, Regent St., London, W., they will post enough of the remedy free to show how it is used in tea, coffee, or food.

Mrs. George Fuller says:—"I am only too thankful my husband never now wishes for intoxicating liquor. I gave him Antidipso in his tea and coffee, and it has quite cured him." With the

FREE TRIAL

Packet will be sent books and testimonials from hundreds who have been cured, and everything needed to save those near and dear to you. Don't neglect to write to-day.

have heard, the row there was here last Saturday when he turned the people out from these rooms where your lover now lives with his mistress. It was terrible. There was a poor woman with two sick children."

How much further the revelations as to Père Didon's iniquity might have gone, Miss Talbot could not say, but at that moment there came an interruption.

From the opposite doorway appeared the figure of Mlle. Beaucaire, carrying a small bag.

She was followed by a man, tall, slight, and closely muffled up, who shouldered a larger portmanteau.

Edith grabbed both the girls, and pulled them close to her against the closed door behind them.

"It is he!" she whispered tragically. "Silence! Let us watch them!"

The man darted a suspicious glance up and down the street. There was no one whom even the clever Henri Dubois could construe as an enemy—no one save some chattering Marseillais loitering around their doorsteps, and three girls huddled together in close conclave directly opposite.

Thus reassured, he strode after La Belle Chasseuse, who cried out impatiently:

"Come quick, Henri; what are you waiting for?"

"Is his name Henri?" whispered the awe-stricken Marie.

"Yes. Isn't he a villain? I wonder where they are going now!"

"Let us follow them and see," suggested Marie.

"Yes, let us follow them and see," chimed in the other one, who delighted in this nocturnal romance. It was a veritable page out of one of Paul de Kock's novels.

The programme suited Miss Talbot exceedingly well.

They strolled off down the street, nestling together, Edith in the centre, and keeping the shrouded couple in front well in sight.

This time, when Mademoiselle Beaucaire and her companion reached the point where the street emerged on to the harbour, they did not cross over towards the broad and brilliantly-lighted Cannebière, but hurried on through the darkness in the direction of a cluster of fishing smacks that lay alongside the Quai de Rive Neuva.

"My faith, Eugénie!" cried Marie, "they must be going on board one of the vessels."

"What a lark!" was the answer. "I suppose they fear you," she added, turning her sharp eyes on Edith. "What is your name?"

"Lucille," came the answer on the spur of the moment.

"Lucille what?"

"Lucille Beauharnais."

"My gracious!" cried Eugénie, "what a swell name!"

"Oh, let us hurry," interrupted Miss Talbot desperately. "You girls know everybody. You must know all the vessels. If they are going on a boat and you find out the name and number for me I will give each of you a whole louis. I will give them to you now—I mean, that is, if you will walk with me afterwards to my lodgings."

For even amidst the exciting circumstances that surrounded her, Edith recognised the absolute necessity there was to maintain the credibility of her previous narrative.

Unquestionably Dubois and the lady intended to embark on one of the fishing boats.

They hastened to the further end of the harbour, through whose tiny entrance Edith could now see the dark waters of the bay beyond, for the night was beautifully clear and fine, and the bright stars of the south lent some radiance to the scene, when the girls quitted the deep shadow of the houses.

A solitary boat, a decked fishing-smack of some forty tons, was lying by the side of the quay, apart from the others. Edith, who knew something about yachting, recognised that her gearing was not fastened in the trim manner suggestive of a craft laid by for the night.

At the same instant, too, she caught sight of a third form—that of a man who had been seated on a fixed capstan, and who now strode forward to peer at the new comers.

Some few words passed between the three, but it was impossible for the girls to hear a syllable.

Instantly the sailor assisted Dubois and Mademoiselle Beaucaire to step down from the quay on board the smack. He followed them, and three other men who appeared out of the chaos of sails and ropes, commenced to labour with a large pole in order to shove the sturdy vessel out into the harbour.

"Quick!" murmured Edith, in an agony lest the opportunity should slip. "Tell me what vessel it is."

"I think," said Marie, "it is the *Belles Sœurs*. Anyhow, we can easily make certain. All we have to do is to go back around the top of the harbour, walk down the Quai de Port, and watch her as she passes under the lighthouse of the Fort St. Jean. They will hoist her sail then and we will see her number."

"Oh, come," cried Edith, "let us run!"

"We can run if you like," replied Marie coolly, "but there is no need. They have to get out by using the sweeps, and we will be underneath the lighthouse at least a minute or two before they pass, even if we walk slowly."

Whilst they were talking the three girls put their words into practice, and Edith found herself battling with a logical dilemma.

Dubois was evidently escaping from France—making out from Marseilles at this late hour on a small vessel which was nevertheless, as she well knew, capable of sailing to almost any point of the Mediterranean.

What could she do? Was it possible to invoke the aid of a policeman and get some authority to hail the craft and order her to return, or was there time to take a cab in the Cannebière and drive furiously to the hotel, where Brett, Fairholme, and her brother must be anxiously awaiting her return?

Rapidly as these alternatives suggested themselves, she dismissed them. It was best to fall in with Marie's suggestion and ascertain beyond doubt the identity of the fishing smack. Then at any rate Brett would have a tangible and definite clue.

So she hastened with her companions along the three sides of the now almost deserted quay, and, in accordance with the prediction of her youthful guides, she reached the promenade beyond the small lighthouse of the inner port before the vessel had quitted the harbour, for to move a forty-ton boat with oars is a slow matter at the best.

As the craft came creeping steadily through the narrow channel Edith saw, to her great relief, that two of the men drew in their sweeps, and commenced to haul upon ropes whilst the clanking and groaning of pulleys heralded the slow rising of the mainsail.

She thought the sail would never climb up in time, but as it began to yield to the steady pull of the men it mounted more and more rapidly, and at last, feeling the influence of a gentle breeze blowing off the land, it shook out its cumbersome folds and the number stood clearly revealed in huge white letters on the dark brown canvas.

At first, in her eagerness, she could hardly discern it, save a big "M" and an "R."

"There!" cried Eugénie, bubbling over with excitement. "There it is! 'M.R. 107, Marseilles. No. 107, you know. Why, isn't that Jacques Le Bon's boat?' she demanded of her companion.

"Yes, it is," said Marie; "and there is Jacques himself standing by the tiller."

Edith's eyes were now becoming accustomed to the light.

"Where are the others?" she said. "I cannot see them. There is no one standing on the deck but the sailors."

"Oh, they have gone below, I expect," said the practical Marie. "They will be in the way of the sails, you know. There is not much room for people that don't work on the deck of a small ship like that. Besides, they don't want to be seen. If a Customs officer or a harbour official were to notice the boat now he would think that Le Bon was going out fishing for the night, but he would be sure to wonder what was happening if he caught sight of a woman on board. Funny, isn't it," she rattled on, "that Jacques should be called 'Le Bon,' for he is the worst man in Marseilles? They say that his ugly grin when he draws a knife would frighten anybody!"

(Another instalment next week.)

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette.

All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.]

A Neglected Girl.

"TWENTY-FOUR" is much concerned about her age. She has reached that number of summers, but as yet has never received attentions from the opposite sex, except the barest formalities. Do I think her case exceptional, and likely to mean that she will be an old maid? "TWENTY-FOUR" tells me she is quite attractive in appearance.

"TWENTY-FOUR" had better not worry herself. Women do not marry so young nowadays as they used to. Many women of thirty are regarded as just at the most attractive age. It is often, too, that certain women do not attract as girls, while as mature women they possess unusual attractiveness for men. Perhaps "TWENTY-FOUR" is one of these. Let me add that there is one very sure way of becoming an old maid, and that is to worry over possibilities. More women grow *passée* out of their own foolish despairings than from the hand of Time.

Calling.

"R. B." asks: "On paying an afternoon call, should one, when leaving, say 'Good-bye' or 'Good afternoon'? Also, should one take one's umbrella into the room or leave it in the hall?"

Never say "Good afternoon" to a friend on whom you are calling. It is formal, and not at all polite. Always say "Good-bye," and on meeting "How do you do?" As to your umbrella, certainly leave it in the hall, but, of course, take your hat with you if it is only a short social call.

Boy and Girl Love.

I AM glad you have summoned up courage to write to me, "APOLLO." You are sixteen, and in love with a girl of your own age, whom, you say, you met last year, and think rather likes you. You have corresponded regularly, but not as yet exchanged any word of love. Of course, you cannot offer marriage, but at the same time would wish to convey to her your feelings.

Well, I see no reason why you should not hint to her when next you write that you are affectionately disposed towards her. At your age neither of you could sensibly become engaged, or even think of marriage; but there is no reason why you should not have an understanding that if your relations continue the same when a few years are past, you will enter into a serious bond.

Of course, though I don't doubt your sincerity or hers in the matter, many things happen between sixteen and twenty-one, and it would be wrong to set too much store now by your feelings. Still, there is no reason why you should not let the girl know how you are disposed towards her.

A Very Faint Heart.

"N. E. R." wishes to make the acquaintance of a girl in his town. He knows a lady friend of hers through whom he could get an introduction, but has not the courage to ask her for it. Can I advise him as to the best method of procedure?"

If "N. E. R." has not the courage to ask for such an ordinary privilege as an introduction, I fear he has that "faint heart" spoken of by the proverb. He has an excellent opportunity to know the girl in the shape of a lady friend. If he is afraid to take this chance, I don't think he would have much success with any other courses I might recommend him.

A Speculative Lover.

"JOHANNESBURG" unfolds to me a story in which love is very closely mixed up with finance. The gentleman who has proposed to her, and been accepted, goes in for speculation on the Stock Exchange. Recently he has lost £2,000 through the sharpness of a broker. He hopes to get this back when affairs in South Africa change for the better. Until this happens, he is reluctant to buy my correspondent her engagement ring. Do I think this is right, seeing that many girls have their rings before the lover can even support himself.

I do not think you need quarrel with your lover because he does not buy you a ring at once. Surely you can wait until he can afford to do so. True love does not need the fetter of an engagement ring to make it binding. If your engagement has been made public, and you do not care about being teased by your friends for not having a ring, get your lover to buy you just a plain gold chain ring. These rings look very neat and nice, are not expensive, and would answer the purpose admirably until your lover is able to get you what he would, had he the money now. A word of warning, however, "JOHANNESBURG," you may take in good part. Men who depend for their living on speculations, and who are apparently so careless in disposing of thousands as your lover, do not make promising husbands, even if successful.

A man who juggles with £2,000 will do the same later on with £20,000 or £200,000 (if he gets them), and amongst speculators the gulf between a millionaire and a pauper is not a very wide one. So it is for you also, to consider whether an engagement between you is desirable so long as your lover can only depend on speculations for his future career.

A Curious Question.

"GEORGE," who, I suppose, is a young lady from the question asked, has met a "fellow" to whom she has taken a great liking. He is about her own age, and she wants him for a friend. Should she ask him to become so, or how should she act?

If you are to be friends, it will be a mutual understanding between you, which should not require any formality. Friends attract each other instinctively, and there is no proposal or acceptance. If he likes you, he will cultivate your society, and you should cultivate his. There is no harm, however, in telling a person that you like him. Reserve in those matters often leads to misunderstanding.

Kissing In Public.

"WHEN my young man and myself are parting at a railway station," writes "VIOLET," "ought we to kiss each other in view of other people?" Certainly, if you do not do it too ostentatiously. It would be foolish to make a huge display of your relationships with each other. A parting kiss, under such circumstances, should be snatched. It is sweeter, too, that way.

Cynthia

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